

UNFENCEABLE SOVEREIGNTIES: RACE, NATURE, AND THE GENRES OF  
POSSESSION IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

APRIL ANSON

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Student: April Anson

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

Stephanie LeMenager	Chairperson
Kirby Brown	Advisor
Sarah Wald	Core Member
Anindita Banerjee	Core Member
Colin Koopman	Institutional Representative

and

Janet Woodruff-Borden	Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
-----------------------	--

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

April Anson

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This dissertation asserts that climate change is a narrative problem in addition to a scientific one. I show the representational challenges of climate change to be bound to the complexities of race and nature expressed in the nineteenth-century American environmental imagination. In turn, I uncover an early and unbroken environmental justice tradition that precedes and exceeds what is currently called the United States.

Instead of separating histories of race from the environment and environmentalism, or assuming that histories and literatures of American environmentalism run counter to the nation's racial and environmental exploits, I uncover canonical nineteenth-century American environmentalist texts that code the land as "naturally" what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls "white possession" through their use of literary genre. Extending the genealogical method utilized by American and Indigenous studies scholars, I build a genealogy of white possession through literary genre, or genrealogy. My genrealogy pursues both functions of the genealogical method, theorizing power relations more clearly and thinking otherwise. It establishes how literary genres like apocalypse, the gothic, or national allegory can uphold or obstruct "naturalized sovereignty," a form of power that proclaims the "natural"-ness of settler colonial understandings of land as property which hides the extractive violences of white

supremacy and settler capitalism. I complicate conventional readings of the American canon that see nineteenth-century writers as merely endorsing land theft, environmental exploitation, and racial hierarchies. Instead, I excavate a counter-archive of early environmental justice literature that is anti-colonial, genrecidal, and survivance-oriented.

I follow this counter-archive into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to clarify the genrecidal environmental imagination, which uses literary genres to eradicate the logics of white possession and to instead build ecologies dedicated to human and other-than-human survivance. Throughout this project, I draw on theories from Indigenous studies, environmental justice scholars, settler colonial and whiteness studies, American studies, the environmental humanities, and genre studies. Through the methodology of genrealogy and the mode of genrecide, I emphasize the political complexity and diversity of coalition building imperative to imagining and building antiracist environmental movements in the context of climate change.

This dissertation includes both previously published and unpublished material.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: April Anson

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Portland State University, Portland  
Universität Trier, Trier, Germany  
Portland State University, Portland  
Lewis and Clark College, Portland  
George Fox University, Newberg

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2019, University of Oregon  
M.A., English, 2017, University of Oregon  
M.A., English, 2012, Portland State University  
M.Ed., English, 2003, Portland State University  
B.A., Writing/Literature, 2000, George Fox University

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Environmental Humanities  
American Studies  
Indigenous and Native American Studies  
Environmental Justice  
Race and Environment  
Nineteenth-Century American Literature  
Political Philosophy

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Instructor, Department of English, Portland State University

Graduate Employee, Department of English, University of Oregon

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University Studies Department, Portland State University

## GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

OHC Dissertation Fellow, Oregon Humanities Center, 2018-19

UO Dissertation Research Fellowship Nominee, English, University of Oregon  
2017

Dorys Grover Award for Best Graduate Paper, Western American Literature,  
2017

Outstanding Teacher of Composition, English, University of Oregon, 2015

Jane Campbell Krohn Fellowship in Literature and Environment, English,  
University of Oregon, 2012

Phillip Ford Graduate Award, English, Portland State University, 2012

Marie Brown Award, English, Portland State University, 2011

Marilyn Folkenstadt Scholarship, English, Portland State University, 2010.

## PUBLICATIONS:

Anson, April. "Sounding Silence in *Sundown*: Survivance Ecology and John Joseph Matthews' *Bildungsroman*." *Western American Literature* 53, 4, 2019, 439-468.

Anson, April. "Framing Degrowth: The Radical Potential of Tiny House Mobility." *Housing for Degrowth: Principles, Models, Challenges and Opportunities*. Edited by Anitra Nelson and Francois Schneider. Routledge Environmental Humanities Series. Routledge, 2018, 68-79.

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Anson, April. "'The Patron Saint of Tiny Houses'." *Henry David Thoreau in Context*. Literature in Context series. Edited by James Finley. Cambridge UP, 2017, 331-341.

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CHAPTER I  
SETTLER COLONIALISM, WHITE POSSESSION, AND THE AMERICAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION

**Overview: Whose World is Ending?**

We are in the midst of an acknowledged sixth extinction. That fact makes it even more difficult to think of my life, landscaped by deforestation, disappearing habitat, and shrinking biodiversity, as someone's fantasy. However, my identity as a "native-Oregonian" and the descendent of the great-environmental schism between loggers and hippies is, indeed, just that: a fantasy. It is a dream made possible because my ancestors shared an identity as unacknowledged *uninvited* settler colonists. I was able to grow up on Kalapuya ilihi (Kalapuya homelands) without any direct knowledge of Kalapuya people.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I was raised in a land supposedly entirely cleared for white settlers' leisure or profit, or both. My life was made possible by both logging trees and conserving them. The conservation and commercialism that I understood to divide my family in reality coheres them – through a form of settler environmentalism that this project interrogates and within which I am implicated.<sup>2</sup> This project is in recognition of the Kalapuya peoples on whose land I was born and raised, an interrogation of the settler colonial fantasies I have been shaped by, and an attempt to think with imaginations of

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<sup>1</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte calls for settlers to confront the ways ancestral fantasies are playing out in real time. Settlers like me must acknowledge that it would have been a fantasy of settlers in the nineteenth century to think that their ancestors would be able to grow up on Turtle Island without any knowledge of the peoples whose land we were on ("Climate Change").

<sup>2</sup> In other words, "'If I am Native to Anything,' it's Settler Environments," which is taken from Alex Young and Lorenzo Veracini's use of Wallace Stegner's quote to frame their article, "'If I am native to anything': Settler Colonial Studies and Western American Literature" which discusses the problem of the west and the frontier as the problem of settler colonialism.

futures outside a system that maintains fantasies by way of horrific realities.

In truth, there exist long and violent histories of extracting settler fantasies through the dystopic world-making of settler colonialism.<sup>3</sup> For Indigenous peoples, those who were forced across the middle passage, and those indentured into the economies of settler colonial capitalism, the end of the world has come and gone, and come and gone, is always the living past and history's present.<sup>4</sup> In stark contrast, the end of the world for me mostly remains, an instinctively future phenomenon. These instincts have sources.

As weather patterns grow increasingly unpredictable and dangerous, they uncannily allegorize end of the world scenarios already familiar to our cultural imaginary. Almost everyday a new iteration of eco-apocalypse arises—from post-apocalyptic stories like *Mad Max* and *Annihilation* to a resurgent interest in Octavia Butler, headlines echo the catastrophic implications of the growing parts-per-million carbon count. Even Patagonia advertisements parrot the Jeremiad-like rebukes and pleas embedded in apocalyptic arcs. Each time I swallow these disastrous predictions, I immediately long for the lush, vibrant natures I was inspired by in my youth—the snow-capped Cascades, rushing crystalline Alaskan rivers, damp and wistful Western coastlines, as well as in the rich swirling prose of Emerson and Thoreau, the wonder of Bartram's travels, and the rushing pace of Shelley's "Mount Blanc." Even now, I reach for the romantic sublimes still stirring in American environmental thought only to recognize those notions knotted to the extinction-driven terrors of settler capitalism.

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<sup>3</sup> Whyte reminds us that, in contrast to the supposed future or in-progress apocalypse of climate change, Indigenous, Black, and other people of color have lived through what their ancestors would see as an apocalypse, and still to some degree find life inside and outside those dystopian presents ("Ancestors").

<sup>4</sup> For work on the intersection of racial formation and Indigeneity, see the work of Ikyo Day on Asian racialization, Tiffany King on Blackness. For the middle passage as apocalypse, see work in Afrofuturism *Armageddon been in effect.*" For colonialism as apocalypse see *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* and Jodi Byrd's *Transit of Empire*.



My imaginative retreat into nature was made possible by, and is firmly wedded to, worlds I wish were ending but worlds that I also benefit from living within. I am situated in the center of the coordinates of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism—the violences of pollution, policing, and paternalism—that make it difficult for each of us to breathe in profoundly divergent ways.<sup>5</sup> This project emerges from the desire to survive the end of that world. It is an attempt to reckon with the plots that environ the settler state, as those environments shift, climates change, and worlds end. It seeks to think with imaginations that have been and are imagining beyond the extinction-imperatives constricting our/my horizons. In this way, this project is one attempt at “unsettling the settler,” as conceived by Paulette Regan and Taiaiake Alfred in their book by the same name. They envision a process by which settlers attempt to learn from the past and make space for Indigenous counter-historical narratives. Their work resonates, too, with *Pedagogies of Crossing* where M. Jaqui Alexander asks readers to consider, as concisely re-phrased by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, the “degree of separation between one’s social location and the subject of one’s social theory” (218). My work takes my social location as a primary target of my research, asking always what it means to investigate and embody that which I study.

In truth, in order to slow, halt, and ideally reverse climate change, environmental activists and scholars like me must do more than expose the causes at their roots. We must imagine beyond them.<sup>6</sup> We must think with something other than the systems that lay waste to landscapes, turn people into fuel, and limit imaginations to the extinction

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<sup>5</sup> CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism is a term first used by the World Rainforest Movement to signify the inextricable link between colonialism and carbon emissions.

<sup>6</sup> I use the “we” here, and throughout this project, to signify those who wish to act to understand, mitigate, and, ultimately, solve climate chaos.

imperatives clogging our climate-changed horizons. In other words, climate change is a narrative problem as well as a scientific one. This project shows that it is a narrative problem that has a lot to do with whiteness and the American environmental imagination. More crucially, it is a narrative problem that people have been imagining beyond since before the beginning of what is currently called America. This project identifies and uproots the fences that have limited our imagination to the plots of those who thought slavery, genocide, and environmental devastation were acceptable costs for power. It also excavates a radical tradition of imaginations unfenced by the pales of property.

When we acknowledge that today's problems are not unprecedented, we can better recognize that there are many, many peoples who have generations of experience in surviving ends-of-worlds and practice adapting to climate change.<sup>7</sup> In all things, where we come from matters, whose land we are on matters, and whose thinking we keep company with matters. They are matters of the imagination and of the material world. If we do the radical work of grasping the roots of the problems that shade us, problems that both regard us with disrespect *and* provide us shelter, we can write ourselves into the future. We can articulate which worlds we want to end, hasten those endings, and discern which worlds we want to work to imagine and create. To write ourselves into the future, we must confront the pasts that made the presents possible, and project beyond them. This work is our privilege and *our* power.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte shows that the realities of Indian removal and relocation forced many Native peoples to learn how to survive in climates completely different than those to which their cultures were accustomed.

<sup>8</sup> This project is one attempt at "unsettling the settler," as conceived by Paulette Regan and Taiaiake Alfred in their book by the same name. They envision a process by which settlers attempt to learn from the past and make space for Indigenous counter-historical narratives. In addition, in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jaqui Alexander asks us to consider, as concisely re-phrased by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, the "degree of separation between one's social location and the subject of one's social theory" (218). My work takes my social location as a primary target of my research, asking always what it means to investigate and embody that which I study.

## The Roots

Many scholars from the social sciences, the physical sciences, and the humanities have importantly identified the roots of the environmental collapses associated with climate change in colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. These systems converge in the settler colonial conquest of the Americas.<sup>9</sup> As a social structure that seeks to replace the original peoples of a land with a new society of settlers, settler colonialism uses conquest (colonialism) in order to make property out of land and extract labor from peoples deemed inferior (capitalism), and extend its power and economic control (imperialism).<sup>10</sup> In other words, when we think about climate change, we have to think about capitalism. When we think about capitalism, we have to think about America and its role in the transition from mercantile to market capitalism and the rise of industrial extraction economies, and to think about those things, we must reckon with histories of genocide and slavery—what John Locke euphemistically called land and labor in his

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<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of these social roots from Anthropology, Geography, and Cultural Studies, see *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*, edited by A Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosekm and Anand Pandian. Geologists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin’s work shows the carbon record linked directly to colonial conquest, and is joined by geographers Alexander Koch and Chris Brierly in a recent summative article for *Quaternary Science Reviews*. My word choice is inspired in part by the concision of @BadSalishGirl’s tweet from April 22, 2018: “Climate change reversal is NOT possible unless there is a dismantling of colonialism, capitalism, imperialism systems that are the root causation. Yet that fact scares everyone who knows they benefit on those systems.”

<sup>10</sup> As a political structure predicated on the elimination of Indigenous peoples to gain access to land, settler colonialism “is a formation of colonial power that ‘destroys to replace’” all Indigenous claims with the naturalness of settler “nativity” on stolen land (Itsuji Saranillo 284). Important to add to this definition is Jodi Byrd’s language of “settler” and “arrivant” to distinguish between those who willingly settled and those who were brought here by force, as is Haunani-Kay Trask’s notion of “settlers of color” (Trask 6). To these distinction, I wish for language that indices the coercion and force of such “irritants” and “settlers of color,” language that includes the coerced and beneficiary status of many of the above mentioned categories. I hubby offer the additional adjectives of coerced and beneficiary in hopes of marking the varying relations to the settler state - where agents of settlement are sometimes coerced and sometimes benefit from there place in the settler state. These differentiations make clear that Settler colonialism is a never-finished and ever-evolving “form of colonial power that justifies settler hegemony through an anti primitive logic akin to anti blackness” (ibid 284). Settler colonialism lives, as Dean Itsuji Saranillo’s entry on the term for *Native Studies Keywords* tell us, through a “mutual relationship between the occupation of contested space and controlling the representation of this occupation” (ibid 285). It lives through stories that naturalize its very being, that paint the past and present within the borders of its own inevitability, erasing its contingency through stories like the ones I have understood myself within.

formulation of property. So climate change is an issue of property and racial formation, a problem of, in the words of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, “White possession.” To address the imaginative failures of our climate changed moment, we must reckon with the white possessive imagination. And we must build beyond it.

### **The Plots**

Settler colonialism’s white possessive environments restricts our vision to what can be seen through the slats of a fence, plotting narrow peripheries that makes the fence look as if it had always belonged there, that make the fence seem natural. The supposed natural-ness of the fence, the naturalization of private property, is a primary technology of settler colonialism that marks a convergence of the multiple valences of the word “plot” - the storylines, schemes, land claims, and burial sites. This project identifies the ways that stories (plots) often narrate a plan or scheme (plot) that naturalizes settler colonial “private property” (plots of land) while erasing the burial plots its plots are plotted upon.<sup>11</sup> The logic of private property particular to Western settler colonialism is plotted in familiar story forms, and these “plots” of settler colonialism are central to addressing our contemporary social and environmental crises. Uprooting those fences, this project thinks beyond the plots that have justified settler colonialism’s racial and environmental extinction-imperative in order to more clearly articulate how story can cultivate abundant futures. A 2017 poem entitled “Syllabus for the Dark Ahead” by Jehanne Durbrow, director of the Rose O’Neill Literary House and an associate professor at University of North Texas, offers a richly concise introduction to the plots this project pursues, unsettles, and sees beyond. It reads:

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<sup>11</sup> In more concise, but likely less clear, terms: plots plot plots of land upon burial plots.

Throughout this course,  
we'll study the American  
landscape of our yard, coiled line

of the garden hose,  
muddy furrows in the grass  
awaiting our analysis,

what's called close reading  
of the ground. And somewhere  
something will yip in pain

perhaps, a paw caught in a wire,  
or else the furred and oily  
yowling of desire.

And flickering beyond the fence,  
we'll see the slatted lives  
of strangers. The light

above a neighbor's porch  
will be a test of how we tolerate  
the half-illumination

of uncertainty, a glow  
that's argument to shadow.  
Or if not that, we'll write an essay

on the stutter of the bulb,  
the little glimmering that goes  
before the absolute of night.

Durbrow's "Syllabus" suggests that in order to prepare for coming catastrophe, we must study the American landscape: "our yard" tells all, it insinuates. From the hose that coils around the poem's beginning to the dying electricity shadowing its close, "Syllabus" sees in the private patch of land a metonym for America and in America, the whole (end) of the world.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I follow Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz in using "America" or "American" to refer to the narrative use of the term, which tends to assume the United States as the sole political and social concern of the continent. "America" additionally signifies a settler-colonial government and mentality, defined settler colonialism as

The syllabus teaches us three crucial lessons. First, to anticipate disaster we must contemplate America, and, more specifically, American property. The plots of American property are the land “awaiting our analysis.” Through a “close reading / of the ground,” we see the Victorian lawns seemingly ubiquitous in the United States, the thirsty colonial rows of their gardens, the leaking hoses poised to unfurl their regularity, the soil burying barbs so deep that digging draws as much blood as it does fuel from fossils.<sup>13</sup> The individual American yard is a schematic one. The second lesson is found in how the poem plots the prospective end of the world: through haunting stutters of light, shadows half-illuminated, yips and yowlings from somewhere within the slatted enclosure. This is an American landscape where neighbors and strangers are indistinguishable through the pales of a fence, where our capacity for uncertainty and tolerance are bounded by the optics of property, and where the enclosure frames in terms apocalyptic, gothic, and national the coming of absolute night. That the poem ends in the darkness it is preparing us for, that the only rapture revealed is that darkness, is the final lesson promised by its title. The “Syllabus” teaches us that the American landscapes of property plot what we need to know about the dim days ahead. This project is learning what the syllabus shows us about who “we” are and how we essay - how we both articulate and attempt to face the truths of world-endings.

### **The Fences**

Following the grounded reading that the “Syllabus” suggests, we find that when we speak of what is currently called “America,” we are talking about the history of

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a past, present, and ongoing structure designed to eliminate a people and gain access to desired lands and resources.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that the paw and fur are the only appendages to register pain suggests the persistent role of charismatic megafauna in communicating the violences of the fence.

colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy.<sup>14</sup> We are talking about a national “we” that was established through genocide, slavery, and environmental violence.<sup>15</sup> We are talking about ends-of-worlds that have their beginnings in white America.<sup>16</sup> And we are talking about the nation as a narrative that rationalizes these forms of power (Cheyfitz). When John Locke declared, “In the beginning the whole world was America,” we can be almost certain he never expected to be narrating the connection between private property and contemporary sea level rise, destroyed mountain tops, anxieties about refugees, and the re-visibility of white nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as the philosopher of these words insists, the fate of the whole world finds antecedent in America, that global history is foretold in the neatly trimmed plotted grass we have come to identify with the America landscape.<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea Smith’s work unveils the white supremacy at the heart of the founding of the United States through the pillars of capitalism’s slavery/anti-black racism, colonialism’s genocide, and orientalism’s war.

<sup>15</sup> This “We” is a shifting, mercurial amalgam. When this project talks about “whiteness” it means to invoke the fickleness of racial formation, not to suggest that whiteness is a stable fact. It is a historical phenomenon that gets mapped variously onto religious, physiognomous, scientific, and class distinctions.

<sup>16</sup> As chapter IV and VI discuss, colonization of the Americas is likened to the apocalypse by a profound range of contemporary scholars. Lawrence W. Gross (Race and Ethnic Studies), Zoe Todd (anthropology), Kyle Powys Whyte (philosophy), Cutcha Risling Baldy (Native American Studies), Rebecca Roanhorse (Law), and Grace Dillon (English) all separately emphasize that Indigenous peoples are experienced survivors of the past and ongoing apocalypse of settler colonial capitalism. Historian Gerald Horne traces the origins of *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* in the formation of the United States, beginning in seventeenth century slavery, white supremacy, and capitalism. So too, Jodi Byrd uses apocalyptic language to define the “zombie imperialism” used “to legitimize and naturalize a social order that included slavery, Indian extermination, and territorial conquest,” and that is epicentered in the U.S. (220). Byrd articulates a structural condition that Fred Moten’s *Black and Blur* calls the “sociological catastrophe of the transatlantic slave trade and settler colonialism.” Indeed, all of Black Science Fiction is premised upon this recognition: the “acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened: that (in Public Enemy’s phrase) Armageddon been in effect” (Sinker). Recent scholarship around Blackness and Indigeneity articulates settler colonialism as a set of technologies aimed at dispossession which communities of color have been outlasting for centuries (la paperson 10).

<sup>17</sup> As Raj Patel and Jason Moore note, the seeming overt contradiction in Locke’s theory of property - both affirming the right to own slaves and the right of “every man” to have “property in his own person” - is not an inconsistency at all, but a product of Locke working under the patronage of the Earl of Shaftesbury, a slaver actively invested in the intellectual formation of the modern liberal subject (192-93).

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell Dean reminds us that in “Discovery, *conquista*, colonization, the founding of the United States under the Lockean principles of government by the people, and the Monroe Doctrine, are the key events in the blood-soaked genealogy of globally” (28).

the self-fulfilling nature of tautology, Locke was right. When we attend to the plots of American property that Locke articulated, we confront the epicenter of our contemporary social-environmental crises.<sup>19</sup> We encounter the past and contemporary reality that when America began, so too the attempted ends of whole worlds. And we also face futures foreclosed by the continuation of social relations founded on Locke's notion of property. When he said, "In the beginning the whole world was America" Locke foretold a climate changed future first founded in his land-as-property story. Today's atmospheric changes are grounded, as it were, in Lockian plots of property. This project argues that in order to address the imaginative failures many associate with climate change, we must upend the fences around these landscaped sacrifice zones, unsettle the ways they are made to appear a natural foundation of our environmental imagination.

Inspecting these property-plots, we find the cipher for our climate-changed horizons in the fences of Western sovereignty. First, Locke's words "In the beginning the whole world was America" becomes, through Eric Cheyfitz' decoding, "In the beginning was property" (55). That transliteration becomes, in Josh Trier's terms, "In the beginning was the fence" (66).<sup>20</sup> Working this rendering backward: the fence defines property, property finds its archetype in America, and America foretells the fate of the world. In other words, in the beginning the whole climate changed world can be found within the

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<sup>19</sup> Here, I mean to suggest that what we think of as merely social crises like poverty, homelessness, or gendered violence in many ways relies on and shares an origin point in Locke's remaking of land into property and restricting human relationships to land to the relationship of owner to property (Tuck and Yang, 5). Social and environmental crisis is co-constituted through the anthropocentrism that Joy Porter notes begins with Locke's writings, and that drives extractive environmental relations but also that influenced modern conservation and recreation movements (6).

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Brown's chapter "Sovereignty and Enclosure" in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* quotes Josh Trier and connects his work to Carl Schmitt's focus on enclosure. Brown uses the fence as emblematic of the persistent theological dimension of Western sovereignty, but does not investigate the close relationship of both Trier and Schmitt to the Nazi party (55)



American fence. These scholars emphasize what political theory has long argued—that the fence is the most fecund metaphor for land appropriation, which forms the basis for Western concepts of political sovereignty, which (through the alchemy of capital’s financialization) is assumed to be and has become the basis of the global liberal politic.<sup>21</sup> The fence is an emblem of property as a priori, as the “guardian of every other right” (Ely). The fences around property’s plots establish the “naturalness” of racialized and environmental violence, attempt to settle a notion of sovereignty as a stand in for the nomos of the world.<sup>22</sup> Not only are “Fences, titles, and enclosures are among Locke’s most fecund and ubiquitous metaphors” as Wendy Brown tells us, the American fence proves the paradigm plot for plowing the whole world under Locke’s secular theology of property, a sacred “territorial mine” at the basis of sovereign power and at the root of the systems of violence coterminous with climate change (Brown 56, 43). The “Syllabus” teaches what Locke’s fences cipher: the beginning of our current climate chaos finds a profound point of origination in the fenced plots of settler colonial America.

Significantly, too, “To fence” signifies a poetics beyond the boards binding the American yard, more than slats demarcating space. To fence is a means to contain, but it also means to traffic in stolen goods and to avoid, evade, or sidestep. This project studies the pales uniting all these plots, clearly marking the materiality of the pale-pun in the fence metaphor. Where fences mark boundaries, they also mark “pales”—the picket or stake of a fence, the enclosure under certain jurisdiction, protected space, as Wendy

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Schmitt refers to Lockian property as foundation for Western sovereignty in the *Nomos of the Earth*, a book that theorized and formalized the definition of sovereignty later used by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Wendy Brown, among others.

<sup>22</sup> The political theory of sovereignty that moves through, if not originates with, Locke gets transmuted into a totalizing, global system through Schmitt and others.

Brown's work on sovereignty details (55). In addition to Brown's insistence on the pale of sovereignty, pale importantly signifies a lack of color, bleached, sick, cadaverous, pallid, weak, and whitish (55). This project likewise witnesses the ways whiteness works to possess, first fencing, then selling stolen land, then evading the truth of its bloodied maneuvers.

In fact, the plots of settler colonial property rights are more rightfully termed the plots of white possession. White possession is the bedrock on which settler colonialism stands—the stable but concealed grounds of its very structure. Indeed, where Moreton-Robinson notes that “white man” is code for the US nation state (57), Brenna Bhandar further shows that, “legal forms of property ownership and the modern racial subject are articulated and realized in conjunction with one another” (5). Bhandar builds on Cheryl I. Harris's seminal essay that shows whiteness to be an analogue to property, we find that the “very fact of white privilege” was embedded “into the very definition of property, marking another stage into the evolution of the property interest in whiteness.

Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites” (1993).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, what Bhandar calls “racial regimes of ownership” undergirding the transatlantic slave trade and Indigenous genocide “produced and relied upon economic and juridical forms for which property law and a racial concept

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<sup>23</sup> Cheryl Harris famously articulated whiteness as property back in 1993, describing the ways the legal legacy of slavery and the theft of lands from Native peoples established a regime of property law informed by racism. Harris shows that whiteness was initially constructed as a racial identity but evolved into a form of property – it is simultaneously a legally protected interest and also a form of identity and personhood. Property establishes whiteness, whiteness operates as a form of property. In 1998, George Lipsitz detailed this in his now seminal idea of the possessive investment in whiteness, noting that white supremacy is not just a matter of attitude, but of structural benefit. Both of these scholars note how whiteness is a form of privilege, just like wealth or education, and it is a self-reinforcing one: if a person is white presenting, statistics have it that a good education, political power, social status, gratifying work, and even the power to shape and narrate their own history is more easily accessed – contemporary iterations are easily seen in the inequality of the American housing market, as access to decent housing and asset accumulation correlates with a person's racial category.

of the human were central tenants” (6). Bhandar identifies John Locke’s “Second Treatises on Civil Government,” which defines property, as the key to the mystical math of this transmutation. In his chapter “On Property,” Locke proposed a formula that formalized the pales of white possession’s cultural practices and formed the basic plot of all settler states, historical and current. For Locke, “Land that is left wholly to Nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage, or Planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste” (Section 42). Land becomes such through the ideology of improvement, naturalizing land theft, genocide, and slavery through the language of “natural justice” collapsed into the summative statement of land + labor = property. This formula forms the template for settler colonial conquest and its invisibilized white possession. The language erases the equations that “land” and “labor” sum: “land” made through the thieving fictions of terra nullius and the brutal realities of Indigenous genocide, and labor extracted from enslaved persons and consecrated through capitalism’s con artistry.

The Lockean formula is the mathematics of white possession, whitewashing any ledgered account of the violences of dispossession and slavery. In and through Locke, all settler colonial violence is erased via the immaculate conception of private property - the magic of *ex nihilo* and *a priori*, out of nothing and before everything, coordinates the immaculate conception of colonialism, capitalism, and empire<sup>24</sup> and consecrates the

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<sup>24</sup> I use the term immaculate conception here to signal the shared phenomenon of *ex nihilo* in “land” and “labor,” its supposed creation out of nothing which therefore secures innocence. In this, I am building on Aileen-Moretton Robinson, who tells of the *ex nihilo* of racialization—how “whiteness operates possessively to define and construct itself as the pinnacle of its own racial hierarchy” (xx). I seek to extend Moreton-Robinson’s analysis to consider Locke’s initial formulation, which precedes the transformations “whiteness” undergoes in the 19th and 20th centuries. In Locke’s land+labor=property, “land” is the product of *terra nullis*, the supposed empty and virgin land that justified Indigenous genocide via slaughter, disease, deceit, and rape. “Labor” is extracted from the supposed “bare life” of Black bodies, bodies excluded from the status of human. “Land” and “Labor” in Locke’s equation indexes the immaculate conception of both colonialism (land) and capitalism (labor) to secure the western hegemonic whiteness of imperialism.

ontological whiteness of settler colonial capitalism. In Locke's settled state, land possession is a mode of securing, perpetuating, and acquitting white racial dominance, erasing the violence of its operations as well as any social relation that exceed those of property and ownership. If property is the fundamental element of the systems that are driving human and non-human extinction, and if settler colonialism is the paradigmatic system of property, it follows that any concern for the well being of the human and nonhuman persons on this planet must dismantle settler colonialism by deliberately imagining beyond the ways its plots of property are fenced - in all its material and metaphoric meanings. Just as fences have material use, marking off boundaries of Western sovereignty's settled spaces, so too its metaphors. To fence is to evade, to traffic in stolen goods, and to contain. These three fencing functions are, too, coded in stories in ways that naturalize settler property relations. In simple terms, certain types of stories plot the fences of white possession—the evasion of responsibility, the theft, and the containment necessary to the maintenance of settler sovereignty.

### **The Plots of Property**

This project traces white possession in the ways certain American literary genres signpost Locke-ian fences. Synthesizing American studies and the environmental humanities with political and continental philosophy, critical race theory, Native American and Indigenous studies, histories of settler colonialism, and critical studies of whiteness as an American racial construct, I focus first on some of the key plots of (white) property poeticized above in the “Syllabus”: the gothic, national-allegorical, and apocalyptic. Each of these genres reveals a key feature of settler fences. In the gothic shadows hide the evasive techniques of fencing while national allegories story notions of

the “commons” limed with fraudulent leases. Further, apocalypse’s end-of-the-world invocations unveil the containment motivating state-of-emergency claims. In each genre, we see the ways white possession gets plotted into American environmental tradition, emphasizing the environmental aspect of Audra Simpson’s characterization of Locke’s theories of property as an origin story.

In its gothic, allegorical, and apocalyptic expressions, Locke’s private property model naturalizes white possession into environmental thought and thus remains the crucial cipher for understanding the original and ongoing unevenness of environmental destruction. This project exposes the plots of white possession undergirding canonical American environmental texts, showing that what the American environmental imagination has historically seen as “world-making” - through Emersonian eyes, Thoreavian solitude, or Muirian mountain peaks - ironically masks the extinction imperative of white settler sovereignty suffusing 21<sup>st</sup> century atmospheres.<sup>25</sup> It answers Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s call to read the American canon not just as foundational texts for American national identity, but to read these figures as colonists, showing that Toni Morrison’s claim that “Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense,” holds true even in texts often regarded as progressive (132). This project also finds that the very same generic conventions can unsettle the fences of settler sovereignty, constituting a canon of environmental literature that supports life beyond the end of the settler state and exemplary of an imagination, past and present, that must guide our projections of possible futures.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee calls this “necrocapitalism”: the “*accumulation by dispossession and the creation of death worlds* in colonial contexts.”

<sup>26</sup> Here I am attempting to echo Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic’s insistence that an environmental justice framework has always been articulated by activism and scholarship.

## The Past's Present

We cannot apprehend let alone arrest our current ecological crises without understanding the pasts that haunt our presents.<sup>27</sup> The worlds we inhabit today are chained to the dystopic drives that drove the settlement of what is currently called the United States. As Angela Davis reminds us in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, the violence of European colonization of the Americas, including “genocidal assaults on the first peoples” and the transatlantic slave trade “constitutes the common history of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the American hemisphere. In other words, there is a longer and larger history of the violence we witness today” (81-82). The American history of colonization, the violent conquest of human beings and the land, is the common history of many continents. It is a history that, as Davis and Chakrabarty separately though differently emphasize, is very much a present reality.<sup>28</sup> These inequities are what would have been, as Kyle Powys Whyte reminds us, the ultimate fantasy of Euro-American settlers in the nineteenth century (“Indigenous Science (Fiction)” 14). Indeed, the white-worlding that naturalized the US settler state in the nineteenth century persists in our regard for climate change as divorced from history. As Chakrabarty’s seminal essay “The Climate of History” tells us, the current climate crisis precipitates a sense of the present that “disconnects the future from the past by putting such a future beyond the grasp of historical sensibility” (197). Chakrabarty makes clear that the history of colonial capitalism, and its settled states, are crucial to understanding and addressing climate

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<sup>27</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty’s formative essay “The Climate of History.”

<sup>28</sup> When we consider the many ways the US nation state regards non-white bodies as resources to be extracted, the ongoing theft of Native territory in the name of corporate extraction economies, and the continual unequal burdens of environmental toxicity placed on peoples of color, we see how Blackness remains a flexible category that marks what is “killable” while Nativeness denotes only nominal notions of sovereignty that can and will be violated in service of the worlds of white male possession, economic and environmental. For the relationship between anti-blackness and settler colonialism, see Tiffany King.

change today. Conversely, the denial of history allows for the denial of climate change.<sup>29</sup>

The white-world-making of the nineteenth century, its plots of white possession, constitutes more than just the narrative imaginary; it plots our climate changed landscapes and threatens to fence our futures in to extinction.

In crucial ways, the concepts of nation and nature that perennially animate white supremacy came together in the American nineteenth century. Nell Irvin Painter's *The History of White People* tracks expansions in who was considered white, and notes the first and second "enlargement[s] in American whiteness" occurred in nineteenth century United States, and were a matter of land, and what and how it produces.<sup>30</sup> Nineteenth-Century America, for all its tired, poor, humbling masses rhetoric, is the paradigmatic example of a "new form of expansionary white racial dictatorship" that Aileen Moreton-Robinson uses to define the nation as a white possession (49). Building on Moreton-Robinson, Brenna Bhandar's *The Colonial Lives of Property* traces the ways that "The colonial encounter," often characterized as a historical precursor to America, "produced a racial regime of ownership that persists into the present, creating a conceptual apparatus in which justifications of private property ownership remain bound to a concept of the human that is thoroughly racial in its makeup" (4). In the American nineteenth century, white possessive relations begin to stand-in for universal ways of being human, where "The concept of the human and the terms that congregate around it—freedom, self-determination, rights, property—do not transcend difference and division. Rather,

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<sup>29</sup> This statement was recently confirmed by research showing that racial resentment (justifiable through a denial of history) strongly correlates with climate change denial (Bengal 733)

<sup>30</sup> According to Painter, the first enlargement in whiteness occurred in mid-nineteenth century enfranchisement, when the right to American citizenship was extended to poor white men via land ownership (107). The second enlargement of the category corresponded to post-antebellum fears over land and profit loss, immigration, and growing class conflict (Painter 211).

they constitute the very lines of demarcation that separate human subjects from subjected humans” (Lloyd 2). Even the grammatical case now known as possessive came into being in the nineteenth century, formalizing a group of relationships - the majority of which are not possessive - into relationships of property.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, nineteenth-century U.S. territorial expansion was buttressed by new language - the institutionalization of racial categories that justified the land theft and labor exploitation necessary for industrial capitalism’s extraction economies.

Despite this, or, as this project shows, in relational parallel to it, what is considered modern environmental thought also arose during this time. Indeed, in nineteenth-century America, Jeffery Myers reminds us, the “ethnocentric outlook that constructed ‘whiteness’ over and against the alterity of other racial categories is the same perspective that constructed the anthropocentric paradigm at the root of environmental destruction” (5). Until recent work by Meyers, as well as Laura Pulido, David Pellow, Paul Outka, Elizabeth Ammons, and Lauret Savoy, however, histories of race were often told separately from those of the environment and industrialization. Even since the sweeping and foundational text *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference* lined out the terms “race” and “nature” as complexly entangled terrains of power, much environmental thought has remained bound to genealogies that separate, and thus reproduce and elide, these racial hierarchies. In truth, when we talk about nature, we must talk about race. And we must talk about the American nineteenth century—and its white nature.

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<sup>31</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the term “possessive” was suggested as a replacement for what was, until then, termed the “genitive” case—a category of language defined as a noun modifying another noun, and includes relationships of composition, participation, origin, description, compounds, and apposition. However, by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, this grammatical case was known almost exclusively as “possessive.” Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the relations expressed within this grammatical case were reduced solely to one of possession, theoretically limiting the many ways nouns can relate to, or act upon, other nouns to property values.



## Settler Natures and Naturalized Sovereignty

“Nature” is a concept that cannot be disarticulated from the bloody horrors of white settler sovereignty’s world-building and the racial formations that prop up its property-making plots. “Nature,” for settler colonialism, is what la paperson calls a technology of “settler property making” - a tool for making land into (white) property and remaking Indigenous, Black, and queer bodies into objects for white possession (2).<sup>32</sup> La paperson reminds readers that, in a settler state, the right to govern is a “supremacist sovereign power over life and death [that is] most chillingly undisguised” la paperson argues, “when we consider the way the life worlds of land, air, water, plants, and animals, and Indigenous people are reconfigured into natural resources, chattel, and waste: statuses whose capitalist ‘value’ does not depend on whether they are living or dead but only on their fungibility and disposability” (4). Reconfiguring life into “natural resources, chattel, and waste” are all a part of the *naturalization* of an imagined community of supreme settler sovereigns. These settler-sovereigns establish and maintain their territorial lives through the elimination of Indigenous life and claims to land and the violences of slavery and racial exclusion. Specifically, narratives about what nature is and what kind of landscapes and people are “natural” are central to U.S. settler state’s regulations of who and what counts as property. In other words, nature is a cipher for the racial ideologies that are embedded in American concepts of possession.

Settler colonialism and western sovereignty both depend on a slippery idea of “nature” to underwrite its racial hierarchies. Indeed, despite their differences, the primary theorists of Western sovereignty, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques

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<sup>32</sup> In Patrick Wolfe’s words, “the application of enslaved Black people’s labor to evacuated Indian land produced the White man’s property, a primitive accumulation if there ever was one” (280).

Rousseau, all use “Nature” as their transcendent, though tautological, justification. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* postulated the sovereign as a safeguard from “the state of nature” where every man is doomed to a savage state of warfare until the collective constitutes a sovereign following “the laws of nature.” Even so, the first lines of Hobbes’ introduction admit, “NATURE, the art whereby God hath made and governs the world, is by the *art* of man,” clarifying this transcendent concept as a manufactured, malleable one (19). And, as we’ve already seen, Locke uses “natural rights” as a means to make property in a tautology where the lack of a property relation justifies taking land in order to make it property. Finally, Benedict Anderson links Rousseau’s notions of popular sovereignty and the “natural” link between climate and character to a “near pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism” (141). The foundation of Western sovereignty rests on these thinkers, whose use of “nature” both characterizes the individual before sovereignty, in the state of nature, and justifies the collective identity as a sovereign, through the laws of nature.

This supposedly natural ground of private property led Carl Schmitt to theorize Western sovereignty as the global political order, the *Nomos of the Earth*. However, the circularity of “nature” here masks what Wendy Brown’s comprehensive study of Western Sovereignty, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* shows: that all early modern theorists of sovereignty formulated “land appropriation as the foundation of political sovereignty and the essential precondition for public and private law, ownership, and order” (Brown 44). “Nature” is thus the cipher in “the discourse of popular sovereignty [that] at the forefront of defending settler rights to property in both land and human chattel”

(“Colonialism, Constituent Power, and Popular Sovereignty” 150). Nature, for Western sovereignty and settler colonialism, is tautological.<sup>33</sup> And it is deadly.

Nature serves as a cipher for the tautological transfiguration of settler property-making: marking bodies as racialized subjects through processes of racial formation and deeming land and nonhuman as objects to be possessed with value to be extracted.<sup>34</sup> This seems circular because it is—if we leave out the materiality of lands and peoples. Each node of this equivalency—nature, race, sovereignty - are all predicated on *corpus nullis*, what Jodi Byrd terms the “living dead of empire” formed through colonization and maintained by the settler state and liberal democratic colonialism. These scholars make clear that, in Michel Foucault’s words, Western sovereignty is bound, from the beginning, “to a form of power that is exercised over the land and the produce of the land” (*SMBD* 36). Donald Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian characterize this in the introduction to their 2003 *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference* as a “working together,” as “race and nature legitimate particular forms of political representation, reproduce social hierarchies, and authorize violent exclusions – often transforming contingent relations into eternal necessities” (3). Settler colonialism relies on Western sovereignty’s use of “nature” to justify private property, which, as we have seen,

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as Giorgio Agamben clarifies, “the state of nature and the state of exception” are “nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or Leyden Jar, in the inside (as a state of exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between inside and outside, nature and exception, *physics* and *nomos*” (*Homo Sacer* 37). The state of nature is the Other to the state of exception, and the state of exception is the defining feature of Western sovereignty, which Mick Smith shows in his book *Ecological Sovereignty* to have a distinctly eco-cidal dimension. It could even be described in the same terms as Marie Cachio uses to describe the “killing abstraction” of race—they both are co-constructed with brutal material consequences in the name of property.

<sup>34</sup> This project follows the likes of Omi and Winant in conceiving of race as a product of racial formation - not a secondary symptom of nation-buidling but a foundational part. Similarly, Barbara Jean Fields defines race as a historical phenomenon arising not of biological or cultural difference but rather out of need to maintain class power (104).

naturalizes a form of white possession and continues the “war by other means” that so many have associated with nation state politics. But if property is, as Cheryl Harris shows, an analogue to whiteness, we can also see here that analogue is contingent on the ways the fences around it are assumed to be natural, dependent on the ways its plots are plotted. In other words, property and Western sovereignty are as vulnerable as their constitutive concepts, nature and race, ideas that once unsettled, do not hold.

In theorizing nature this way, I aim for that unsettling—exposing the contingency of settler colonialism and Western sovereignty. In the context of settler colonial capitalism, “nature” naturalizes land into property and bodies into racialized subject/objects for possible possession. It masks the whiteness and violence of settler colonial property-making through its ideology of Western sovereignty, a supposed metaphysical truth that inheres in settler subjects whose whiteness is unmarked, apolitical, and universal. Just as sovereignty in its Western formulation is constituted by its paradoxes—the sovereign is both a sign of rule and outside the law, a name for absolute power and political freedom, generative of order through subordination and freedom through autonomy—so, too, is “settlement.” To the extent that “to settle” means to reconcile, to establish a body of persons as residents, to plant in a location, and to fix in a relation of permanence between people and place, it implies a relationship of seemingly uncontested occupation predicated on the prior existence of non-ownership. Yet, as “settle” also means the process of property-making required to make owners, to *establish* a person in legal possession of property, to enthrone, to imprison, and to bring to an end, “to settle” denotes a much more contingent—and sinister—complex of white settler sovereignty linked to the fantasies of permanence that pervade racial capitalism, and

settle—or tranquilize—its Others. Settler colonialism, as Audra Simpson has deftly noted, is never a settled matter. Its contingency must instead be at the very heart of imaginations of climate change, no longer naturalized into a narrow vision of sovereignty or a supposedly universal subject.

To draw attention to this contingency, I use the term “naturalized sovereignty” to mark a form of power that proclaims the supposed innate-ness of private property as a justification for the extractive social and material relations of settler capitalism as well as its transcendental white sovereign.<sup>35</sup> The term “naturalization” refers to a number of processes: depolarization, erasure, exclusions that constitute the nation as natural.<sup>36</sup> Thus, naturalization is both the apolitical precondition of the nation itself and a depoliticizing tool by which difference is made eternally, transcendently natural. To naturalize is, in la paperson’s language, to feign permanence, to falsely appear as “permanently alienated into property” or property relations (1). Naturalization makes property seem natural, through what Brenda Bhandhar calls the “spectacularly circular reasoning” of property (100).<sup>37</sup> Thus, this project understands naturalized sovereignty as “the deployment of nature as alibi, as a fertile allegory for rendering *some* people and objects strange, thereby

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<sup>35</sup> “Naturalized sovereignty” is also my answer to Mick Smith’s call in *Against Ecological Sovereignty* for a political and ecological critique of the principle of sovereignty as well as a response to what Karena Shaw identifies as the “problem of the political” where the “sovereignty story” is no longer adequate or appropriate (3).

<sup>36</sup> Naturalization can refer to depoliticization: “To naturalize is to assign such stable and intrinsic essences to people, relations, and things” (Moore, Kosek, Panindian, 25). It may insinuate erasure: “[T]o describe a people as outside history... is to naturalize them, to render them powerless” (Millon 69). It may also make the exclusions that constitute the nation seem natural: the 1790 Naturalization Act (drafted by Thomas Jefferson) used phrases “natural born” and “native born” though the document was drafted before the foundation of the United States, using naturalization to refer to the process by which an outsider is officially recognized as a member of a nation (typically described as an alien becoming a citizen) and the exclusion upon which the body of the nation is built (Meyers 19).

<sup>37</sup> Bhandhar writes: “The legal form of property works to naturalize modern private property relations, rendering illegible all preexisting relations of use and ownership; this is more easily realized in places where the inhabitants are deemed by the force of law to be something less than civilized (defined, of course, in spectacularly circular reasoning, by the absence of private property)” (Bhandhar 100).

to authenticate the limits of the ‘natural’ order of things” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 146). This allegorical, metaphorical life of nature has material consequences, as Kevin Hutchings reminds us: “one need only remember that the various concepts of nature have been invoked historically to ‘naturalize’ the institutions of such things as patriarchy, capitalism, and class-based power structures, racism and slavery” 912).

“Naturalized sovereignty,” then, denotes racism and its racial formation as the originary condition underwriting settler sovereignty—environmental racism is the necessary infra-structure of the state of exception.<sup>38</sup> These infra-structures, below the ground of settler sovereignty’s superstructure, are stabilized through the supposed naturalness of private property relations, where the principles of “free land” (stolen from Indigenous peoples of North America), “free labour” (extracted from the bodies of those forced into servitude and slavery), and “free men” (embodied by enfranchised white men with property) are the premises upon which the unequal political and material landscapes of America are founded and continue (Bullard, “Confronting Racism in the Twenty-first Century”). Naturalized sovereignty indexes not just the racial formations excluded from a universalized white settler subjectivity through the rhetoric of ‘nature.’ Simultaneously, it establishes the American “Nature” tradition as the whitewashed, ordained Eden. Calling attention to the work of naturalization necessarily *denaturalizes* this phenomenon, naming it as a type of sovereignty that is, and must necessarily continually be, naturalized.

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<sup>38</sup> I follow Ta-Nehisi Coates and Ibram X. Kendi who show that race is the product of racism; race is not a category of being that precedes, or gives rise to, racism. If environmental racism is defined by “actions or practices carried out by members of dominant (racial or ethnic) groups that have differential and negative impact on members of subordinate (racial and ethnic) groups” then naturalized sovereignty is the political ecology of environmental racism, the political cover for what Shiloh Krupar calls the “necroecologies of whiteness” that continue to preserve pastoral enclaves through racialized sacrifice zones. Naturalized sovereignty sculpts a universal subject out of the marble of white possessive individualism, reinforcing what Moreton-Robinson’s terms “ontological structure of white subjectivity” to which “racial subjects, the black slave, the Native, the savage, [are] exterior,” (Moreton-Robinson 50, Bhandhar 168).

“Nature” entrenches the racial formations of naturalized sovereignty, naturalizing the sovereignty of a universalized settler subject that gets its personhood through property – property made through economies of dispossession and extraction. These notions of nature that root patriarchal white sovereignty are so foundational to the U.S. settler state that they are at times insidiously institutionalized in what many regard as the radical thought of canonical nineteenth-century American environmental writings - even though the American nature tradition is often thought to run in counter-distinction to the nation’s exploitative relations (we often cite the trenchant critiques of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s abolitionism, Henry David Thoreau critiques of industrialization, or John Muir’s railing against the loss of wild spaces). However, the most canonical concepts associated with the American environmental imagination writ large, even as they are expressed in these individual, sometimes-radical thinkers, are intimately bound to nineteenth-century racial formation and settler colonial notions of white possession. The racist history of American national parks and their conservation calls has been well documented.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the American notions of a transcendent nature, the wild wilderness, the frontier, the pastoral life, and the sublime experience are all tied to racial ideologies of white supremacy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the racialized history of US wilderness conservation, see the work of Dorceta E. Taylor, Mark David Spence, Theodore Catton, Issac Kantor, Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek, William E. O’Brien as well as the Jonathan Peter Shapiro’s book on Madison Grant that explicitly ties conservation to the eugenics movement. Stephanie LeMenager’s reminder that “The year that debates about preserving Yosemite were launched, 1863, marked a time for protecting an American passion as innocent as wonder; this was the bloodiest year of the U.S. Civil War” is emblematic of the longer histories the aforementioned texts trace (LeMenager, “Nineteenth,” 401).

<sup>40</sup> What Laura Dassow Walls calls the transcendence of a “Pure, untainted Edenic American nature” canonized by Ralph Waldo Emerson still shows traces of the racist theories espoused by his friend Louis Agassiz, despite Emerson’s abolitionist commitments (*Seeing New Worlds* 10, “Science and Technology” 575). These traces of racial ideologies are very much alive in the document that many cite as originating American environmental thought and literature, Emerson’s *Nature*, which chapter 1 will discuss. With Emerson’s *Nature*, “nature” became a transcendent and inexhaustible resource that reinforced the naturalness of racial hierarchy and the extraction economies, hellish landscapes occluded in a transcendental American Eden. One of the most consistent features of this Eden is its pristine wilds, its

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wildernesses. And yet, the idea of wilderness is a social construct of American environmental literature - what David Mazel and others link to the formation of a dangerous nationalism. Indeed, the inarguably racist history of the discourses of “wildness” (or “savage,” “barbarian,” “untamed,” “primitive,” et.al.) is “The Trouble with the Wilderness” in our environmental imagination. The language of the “wild” emerged from and continues to support a system of romantic imagining that flees from history. Cronon’s work, though not focused on race, makes clear that the idea of the wilderness is the basic unit of extractive environmental relations that depends on Indian removal and benefits the white Euro-American settler. “The removal of Indians to create an “uninhabited wilderness”—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is. [...] In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history. Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin. Seen as the frontier, it is a savage world at the dawn of civilization, whose transformation represents the very beginning of the national historical epic. Seen as the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it is the place of youth and childhood, into which men escape by abandoning their pasts and entering a world of freedom where the constraints of civilization fade into memory. Seen as the sacred sublime, it is the home of a God who transcends history by standing as the One who remains untouched and unchanged by time’s arrow. No matter what the angle from which we regard it, wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us.” (Cronon 16). The wilderness is often imagined as a demarcated boundary of another imagined geography - the frontier. The frontier shifting location on the edge of the wild, a space of incentivized Indian slaughter, “lawlessness,” and “free” land that catalyzes a rugged and distinctly American individualism. The frontier has been a cultural construct key to making “American” identity out of the eugenics of westward progress since before it appeared in James Fenimore Cooper’s racist-trope-filled novels of the early 1800s and persists despite being declared “closed” by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 text (a seminal essay in environmental history that chapter 3 will discuss at length). Just as Cronon shows the frontier to be a founding ideal in the American environmental imagination, the frontier can never be closed - it is only re-visited through the increasingly minuscule optics of neoliberal microscopes.

The frontier’s foil is found in the “safety” of the pastoral garden and the risk-culture cult of the sublime, both concepts securing the racial hierarchies of settler environmentalism. Not only does the pastoral express an impulse of possession, as Annette Kolodny’s work shows, that exploitation and newness Kolodny described is easily transmuted into the new garden of American yeomanry, which Leo Marx showed to vein dialectical tension with industrialization. The garden, rather than the city, persists as a refuge against what Patrick Wolfe calls the “commercial pastoralism” of settler capitalism (*Traces* 180). This garden gets refigured, according to Paul Outka, into the plantation pastoral -where slavery is naturalized through images of harmonious and abundant antebellum enclosures (88). Such pastoralism persists today in the tranquil yet perpetually threatened scarcity model of “the commons.” Popularized by Garret Hardin’s “Tragedy of the Commons,” the notion of the commons is, in Rob Nixon’s astute analysis, is a “disinheritance plot” that adds a neat literary framing to the same “accumulation by dispossession” that David Harvey’s work describes (Nixon 594). This peaceful, pastoral commons is scarcity in service of the settler state.

Where the pastoral tames a wild into a garden, the sublime substitutes the real - but safely distanced - recognition of horror, visible in what we now call risk culture. As an experience of confronting death from a place of relative safety, the sublime is by definition in service of a subject position of power - white patriarchal power. Outka details the ways the sublime itself served as an evasion from the horrors of slavery in the American context, an evasive function borne out in the aesthetic mode’s longer history. Kevin Hutchings’s *Romantic Ecologies and Colonial Cultures in the British-American World, 1770-1850* reminds us that the sublime originates in romantic concepts of nature “that have been invoked historically to ‘naturalize’ the institutions of such things as patriarchy, capitalism and class-based power structures, racism and slavery, hetero-normative social relations, and other forms of political authority” (12). Hutchings looks at the political implications of colonized nature, locating a dramatic change in the human-nature relationship in the romantic period that “often explicitly promoted a full-fledged human conquest of the non-human realm” (9). Hutchings demonstrates that romantic and enlightenment notions of dominion and empire defined relationships to land and the female body, connections Kate Soper and Carolyn Merchant canonized into ecocriticism. These formative ecofeminists show the sublime naturalizes the



These familiar, and sometimes dear, tropes “naturalize whiteness” and environ the white settler state (LeMenager, “Nineteenth,” 401).<sup>41</sup> They also define and delimit who is allowed to belong to the universalized subject category of liberal humanism, an apolitical category that is nothing more than a proxy for the white settler sovereign.<sup>42</sup> “Nature, nation, and whiteness find a common body of expression” in the American nature tradition that many associate with John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (Moore, et. Al 30).<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that some of the legacies left by Muir,

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colonial project. Soper cites the shared “perception of the colonizer” while Merchant traces patriarchal domination of both land and the female body in part from Kant’s sublime (142, 83-85). And though it is outside the scope of this argument to detail the differences in the sublime as it was first conceived by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, suffice to say Kant’s is typically considered the more liberal, radical version. As such, it is used to exemplify the racial orders in even the most liberal of our environmental imaginings. Marc Redfield broadens this ecofeminist point in the “The Politics of the Aesthetics,” reminding us Kant’s sublime is inherently political because “Always at stake in these various interrelated formations is the status of the human” (20). Thus, when we think of the sublime, we are thinking about structures of power - gendered, raced, and determinate of who gets to be “naturally” human and in what “natural” places. A succinct review of literature taking up issues of race in the context of environmental thinking can be found in Meyers, 7-9.

<sup>41</sup> Stephanie LeMenager uses the phrase “naturalize whiteness” in summary of Paul Outka’s word on the beloved John Muir in Outka’s book *Race and Nature*, but the idea is exemplary of a larger phenomenon that this project traces.

<sup>42</sup> “The human” is, as Black feminist like Sylvia Wynter, Saidiya Hartman, and Alexander Weheliye shows us, a category synonymous with the white, Western man. This is what Sylvia Wynter calls “the genre of the human,” where gender, race, and class power relations are papered over in creation of the tyrannically maché-ed visage of the universal subject. This universal subject is a form of personhood made through property, as Locke formulated, scholars like Grace Hong and Brenda Bhandhar unpack, and C.B. Macpherson famously described in his theory of possessive individualism which detailed the theories of ownership as postulated by Locke as the basis for the relationship between market forces and the constitution of modern political subjectivity (163). The universalism of the “human” masks the “concomitant racial and ecological hegemony” of white settler sovereignty that seeks “to maintain the separation and primacy of the white self by domination and mastery of the Other - human and nonhuman” (Meyers 16). Instead, the settler sovereign is enthroned into the heroic subject position in the “trope of white mobility animating North American cultures of Nature” (Moore Pandian, and Kosek 30).

<sup>43</sup> The tyranny of the universal subject of white, settler sovereignty takes paradigmatic form in John Muir’s sardonic term “Lord Man” - Muir’s embodied metaphor for “civilization” and its dominating, colonizing, and war-like forces. Yet, just as Muir positioned Lord Man as the root of all ills, he also never imagined anything other than a white, able-bodied, property-owning man as the antidote - whiteness soothing the irritations made by his own racism, as Carolyn Merchant shows (366). Thus, Muir’s construction of a “modern white subjectivity,” in Outka’s terms, epitomizes an escape from racial guilt embedded in the American environmental imagination (162). Muir’s categorizations of “life” exemplify the internal inconsistencies that are inherent in a nature tradition that attempts to dole out rights based on possession. Muir extended the category of “life” to plants but “refuses to include certain human types, often ‘negroes’

Thoreau, and many of the other most recognizable of American environmental thinkers have nothing to give us. In fact, paying attention to these settler natures allows us to weed out the white supremacy whitewashing our environmental ethics. Paying attention allows us to denaturalize the metaphysics of white possessive that plots all being, knowing, time, and space through the prism of (white) property. It frees us to think otherwise.

Once we pay attention to the ways “nature” naturalizes settler property relations, we are better able to recognize “nature” not lost to settler colonial capitalism’s extractive and violent relations. Many nineteenth-century American writers express the complex entanglements of race, environment, and settler colonial capitalism that are otherwise short-circuited in ahistorical notions of “Nature” and its states. As Stephanie LeMenager reminds us:

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and poor whites” within the “life possessed of rights and protected by a corporate body, such as the state or, in Muir’s case, the state of Nature” (LeMenager, “Nineteenth” 398). Thus, what Muir called Lord Man cannot be disarticulated from a notion of the human that is built from and sanctified by the brutality of its sovereignty: the “Lands, leases, and laborers [that] form the bases of an American feudalism” reveal the theological heart of sovereignty transferred onto the white property holding male (Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*, 118): Wendy Brown’s *Walled States* reveals the theological core of Western sovereignty, while Cheyfitz shows that Locke implicitly translated the bible to suggest “in the beginning was property,” linking possession and property through the concept of “title” (Cheyfitz *Poetics* 55). Moreover, Black studies has shown ways that the “human” or “man” actually signifies a racial hierarchy, a recent example can be found in Alexander Weheliye’s *Habeas Viscus*, which reminds us that, “as an object of knowledge, whiteness designates not actually existing groupings but a series of hierarchical power structures that apportion and delimit which members of the Homo sapiens species can lay claim to full human status” (19). Thus, Muir’s nineteenth-century concept of Lord Man epitomizes the ways that the canon of American environmental thought, even while seeking to critique systems of power, too often plots the world through white possession, naturalizing settler sovereignty by universalizing that which is historically, politically, and ideological contingent. Beyond Muir, classic figures associated with American environmentalism such as Henry David Thoreau express complicated relationships to race, “progress,” and conservation. Thoreau condemned slavery, protested the Mexican-American war, and demanded nature conservation in the face of American industrialization. However, his own experiment in living at Walden was made possible through the removal of Native peoples, an erasure that Thoreau only acknowledges briefly in *Walden*. This exclusion anticipates broad trends of appropriation where tribal land was confiscated for settler homesteading, corporate use, and National Parks and forests. Thoreau, and even more so his popular legacy that imagines him as a metaphorically indigenous American, shows us how American environmental thought is too often bound up in systems of racism and colonization even while it seeks to critique them. In Jedediah Purdy’s incisive words, “It can only help to acknowledge just how many environmentalist priorities and patterns of thought came from an argument among white people, some of them bigots and racial engineers, about the character and future of a country that they were sure was theirs and expected to keep.”

When read without suppositions about Nature, nineteenth-century American literature wreaks havoc upon twentieth-century environmental truisms. It is a literature for the twenty-first century in that it offers an unfinished, lively engagement with the Nature idea. In the nineteenth-century United States, Nature had yet to be fully formed as the agent of a broad system of modern ideologies, from the genocidal programs of eugenics to the populist preservationism instantiated in the national parks” (“Without Nature” 393)

LeMenager concludes that, “clues to survival reside” in “The alternate genealogies of ecological imagination embedded in nineteenth-century American literature” (394).

Indeed, as the first three chapters of this project show, many nineteenth-century American literatures express and reveal, but also contest, the pales of settler colonialism’s naturalized sovereignty - the plots that plot land as “naturally” a white possession and coordinate the US settler state’s racial and environmental exploits. Many nineteenth-century writers express anti-racist, anti-capitalist environmentalisms beyond the fences of settler colonialism’s naturalized sovereignty, exemplifying an early and vibrant environmental justice tradition that extends into the twentieth and twenty-first century texts. These texts tell us much about imagining justice and survival in the context of current climate crisis, and the profound role stories have to play in building abundant, ethical, and survivable futures.

We cannot solve problems in the present with the logics that created them. This recognition requires that we first unearth the roots of those logics, tracing naturalized sovereignty through ideas of “nature,” the “natural,” and natural law that have been used to erase the violences of settler colonial capitalism’s property-making, as well as animate notions of the transcendent, wild, frontier, pastoral, and sublime natures that have enthroned the white settler as the universal sovereign subject. These facets of naturalized sovereignty showcase how epistemological expectations can set the limits of what is

knowable and what is possible. However, once we identify how stories institutionalize these expectations, how they naturalize sovereignty, we can also better understand how they can imagine beyond the pales, or boundaries, that fence our imaginations to the plots of settler sovereignty's environmental and racial violences. The two aims of this project are thus: identify the plots of naturalized sovereignty and imagine beyond them.

### **Method: Genealogy and Genre**

This project uses the genealogical method to understand the ways naturalized sovereignty is assumed as a standard, generic fact in the American environmental imagination and the ways that literary genre offers a key site for building an alternative and early critical environmental justice literary tradition unbound by the fences associated with white possession. In the first half of the project, it employs the genealogical method as first theorized by Michel Foucault to trace the ways literary genres exhibit, contest, or imagine outside the natures of white possession. Genealogy is a method first theorized by Foucault that has since been taken up by American and Indigenous studies scholars.<sup>44</sup> Genealogy is often summarized as a history of the present—an inquiry into historical moments that interrogates the production, maintenance, and revision of a series of claims to truth in order to show that no moment is historically inevitable (Koopman). This project pursues both functions of genealogy—to theorize power relations more clearly and to think otherwise. And I interpret this method through

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<sup>44</sup> Alyosha Goldstein writes: “As a method, genealogy both elucidates the proprietary claims to descent and the lineages of settler nation building and potentially destabilizes claims to an immanent and unilinear history. In the colonial context, as Mark Rifkin argues, genealogy as a corollary to specific indigenous kinship principles that are modes of governance upsets the liberal division between public and private” (5). These scholars show Foucault’s genealogical model is ideal for enacting what Linda Tuhiwai-Smith calls a “decolonizing methodology.”<sup>1</sup> To tell alternative histories, for Tuhiwai-Smith, is to hold alternative knowledges, to transform history into justice (39) Indeed, in a study of landownership and the “micro techniques of dispossession,” Paige Raibmon writes that “Genealogy requires that we suspend our tendency toward teleology while we examine the myriad makings of dispossession in all their confusion and complexity” (59).

literary studies to build a genealogy of white possession through literary genre—a method I call genreology. I use a genealogical method to identify the ways particular literary genres make settler sovereignty *natural*, following interdisciplinary American Studies scholar Amy Kaplan’s investigation of literary form as social practice.

Though this genealogy confirms literary genres as capacious, and undeniably political, objects—it finds in genre an expansiveness that demands a definition. Genre studies has long recognized that literary genre signifies specific expectations and ideologies. Stories are how we sense our world, and thus are capable of revealing how notions of power are imagined and enacted. This is especially true for literary genre—categories of story that shape and signal readers’ expectations. To this established understanding of literary genre this project considers genre as both ideological and material. Just as Raymond Williams regarded literary genres in relation to the specific conditions in which they are produced, Wai Chi Dimock’s declares, following Jacques Derrida, that genre is a field of knowledge (1377). Similarly, Mark C. Jerng’s reminds readers that genre fictions are at the center of racial world making. These notions of genre align with Alastair Fowler’s formative account that defines genre as formal structures comprised by a “complex of elements” that exist in “thoroughly historical” hierarchical relationships to one another, and thus must be understood in the context of specific space and time (202, 208). Fowler notes that the flexibility of genre necessarily leads to a breaking down of the elements that characterize it. In this decay, according to Fowler, genre is reduced to mode before then being reformulated anew. This project chooses to give the label of “genre” to the whole of the processes Fowler traces, regarding genre as a set of expectations with the adaptability to shift according to historical, political, social

changes. Genres are world-making technologies that also reflect the worlds in which they appear - they express and shape what we can know and how we know it.

While Fowler's formation classifies story-types such as gothic, allegory, and apocalypse as modes, this project seeks to understand these story-forms in terms of how they operate in popular culture and lived experience. Rather than parse the significance of prose projected onto a screen or encountered on the page, the term "genre" signifies the persistence of a set of expectations across forms, where an apocalyptic novel or film is generally understood to belong to the same type of story. It is this social coherence that my use of the term genre seeks to sustain. I draw from Lauren Berlant's emphasis on the political significance of genre's historicity, thinking genre as an "aesthetic structure of affective expectation" that mediates social relations and defines what is, and who has access to, the good life (*Female 4*). Jodi Byrd puts a finer point on Berlant's attention to social relations when declaring, "genre demarcates what does and does not belong and what it does and does not belong to. It embraces and refuses, includes and excludes all for the sake of producing a recognizable form of attachment and then interpretation. Genre, in other words, colonizes texts; it collects, categorizes, and arrays textual productions into shelved units for instant marketability and digestability, and, in the process, produces its own others" ("Red Dead Conventions," 345). Indeed, genre does "produce its own others" as flexible bundles of expectations that both reveal the political hierarchies structuring the moment in which they are written and shape our social relations, imaginative and physical.

In truth, genre does not just serve a predictive function. It can provide a set of expectations that helps us understand the past and present, serving as a framework for

lived experience. For example, Potawatomi environmental philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte shows that the structure of settler colonialism is a past and ongoing apocalypse. Thus, while the literary genre of apocalypse typically regards the unsettling end of a (white) world, the genre of apocalypse can also reveal and reflect lived realities. Genre is a set of expectations that is a product of history, power, and lived experience.

As such, this project clarifies the ways genre, as a set of expectations that inform lived reality, has the potential to encode or challenge property-making, naturalizing or unsettling settler sovereignty and, by proxy, colonial violence.<sup>45</sup> To tie two of Byrd's thoughts together, genre produces "its own others" and can naturalize property's "dispossession, devouring, and destruction of the Other" in the process. Just as Sylvia Wynter calls the attention to the mutability and epistemological politics of the category of "human" by calling it a genre, this project aims to identify the nuanced expectations that structure literary genres and the ways those can be used to variously encode and inscribe, or challenge and unsettle the authority of Western settler sovereignty, racial hierarchy, and environmental exploitation. This project illuminates the political power (historical and current) of literary genre for remapping western American literature through attention to place-historical and geographical-when understood in very particular historical and geographic locales (Glotfelty 46).

In this methodology, this project amplifies the words of activist and social justice facilitator, adrienne maree brown, who reminds us that if "Imagination is one of the

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<sup>45</sup> Property, too, according to Jeremy Bentham, "is only a foundation of expectation—the expectation of deriving certain advantages from the thing said to be possessed, in consequence of the relations in which one already stands to it." Jodi Byrd and others show Bentham's "economy of expectations" to be "predicated upon the abstraction, consumption, and disposal of other people and places" (Byrd et al., 4). Property is a genre of abstraction - expectations dependent upon the very real dispossession, devouring, and destruction of the Other—abstraction and metaphorization that literary genres can naturalize or unsettle.

spoils of colonization, which in many ways is claiming who gets to imagine the future for a given geography,” then “Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. We are living now inside the imagination of people who thought economic disparity and environmental destruction were acceptable costs for their power. It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future” (brown 163, 197). This project takes brown’s words as a clarion call for the importance of literary, cultural, and genre studies for environmental justice work. It is in recognition of our right and responsibility to imagine beyond the worlds we want to end, beyond the extinction-driven path epitomized by climate chaos, outside the toxic atmospheres of CO2lonialism. As the first half of the project shows, many writers used literary genre to upend the racial and environmental assumptions of Western sovereignty and settler colonialism at the very historical moment and location in which those systems were being institutionalized in nineteenth-century America.

I build this genrealogy of white possession by examining historical moments defined by problems of “possession”—crisis moments for the stability of settler colonialism’s naturalized sovereignty. I then regard this crisis in terms of its literary generic counterpart, identifying the literary genre that most closely matches the historical problem set. I show the ways literary genre plots land as “naturally” a white possession into the American environmental imagination and I excavate a counter-archive of nineteenth century environmental justice literature that shows it could always be otherwise. For example, chapter one looks at the genre of the American Gothic in the era of the Marshall Trilogy, the supreme court decisions that marked the incorporation of Native Americans as “wards” of the U.S. Government, both sovereign and domestic



dependents, inside and outside. In other words, this chapter investigates how the gothic responds in a moment when the naturalness of settler sovereignty first confronts its uncanny, Gothic Other.

The first three chapters take up the genres of the gothic, national allegory, and apocalypse, respectively. For each genre study, I look first to a canonical environmental text to understand the ways that naturalized sovereignty, or the fences of white possession, is plotted into the American environmental imagination. Each chapter then turns to a well-known American author infrequently studied, especially in relation to environmental politics, to understand the broader political capacity of the literary genre to address the problem of possession. Finally, the chapter reads a text written by a Native author whose positionality and literary production speak directly to the ways the genre is capable of offering counter-histories that imagine alternative futures foreclosed by racialized imperatives of American naturalized sovereignty. In this comparative first half, I trace the ways that each literary genre upholds or defies settler sovereignty's racial hierarchies and environmental abuses.

Genreology exposes the ways the US settler state evades history through the gothic, traffics in stolen goods in national allegory, and contains its structural apocalypse by way of state-of-emergency stories of apocalyptic events. In each of the first three chapters study, I show how a canonical Euro-American genre frays or implodes under the pressure of the powerful counter-narratives and critiques that settler colonialist projects are destined to produce. This seemingly generic nature of white possession in American cultural and physical landscapes is a question, in fact, of genre.

## Genrealogy: Chapters II-IV Overview

Chapter II, “Evasive Natures: The American Gothic and Environmentalism’s Haunted Histories” exposes the haunting histories of genocide and slavery evaded in the American environmental imagination. Specifically, the American Gothic displays an uncanny obsession with, and repression of, the violences of (dis)possession at the time of Andrew Jackson’s 1830 Removal Act and the first conservation legislation in 1832 for National Parks. This chapter finds Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature* an insidiously originary case of “settler environmentalism” that expose the gothic’s “plots” of possession rooting our canonical American environmental imagination—the storylines, schemes, land claims, and burial sites that ground US settler sovereignty through environmental conservation. While many cite *Nature* as inaugurating both the American literary renaissance and American environmental thought, the text should more readily be regarded as a paradigm text of gothic disavowal linking US settler sovereignty, its histories of Indian removal and chattel slavery, and environmental conservation.

In the same time and space that *Nature* plotted America’s haunted environmental imagination, Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Apess (Pequot) respectively clarify and contest these pales. Hawthorne’s “Roger Malvin’s Burial” reveals the ways the land itself can signify haunted histories, helping us remember the co-constitutive violence of genocide, slavery, and environmental destruction. Even more compelling, Apess’ “Eulogy on King Phillip” goes further to show the ways that land itself is a historical agent, that histories haunting extends beyond the fences, pales, of settler sovereignty to the historical present. Rather than American environmental thought beginning with *Nature*, Hawthorne, and even more so Apess, offer environmental imaginations rooted in

the ground beneath their feet. Through these three texts, we are able to clarify the uncanny capacity of the American Gothic to show what was previously hidden, buried, or Othered. The gothic can seed the spectral work of settler sovereignty, as in *Nature*, turning nature into property, history into ghost, and environmental thought into a dehistoricized haunt. Or, it can materialize history, as in Hawthorne and Apess, making past present and unsettling the ghostly nature of white possession canonized at the heart of the American environmental imagination. The American Gothic can help us build futures outside the rapacious relations imagined by settler sovereignty, repairing the eco-horrors that climate catastrophes carry through the histories, texts, peoples, and lands that imagine beyond them.

Chapter III, “Stolen Natures: National Allegory, Nature’s Nation, and the Commons as Confidence Game,” reveals the American national allegory as a means of fencing in stolen goods, using notions of the “commons” to paper over the simultaneity of settler colonial pursuit of, or race for, land with the formation of new categories of race and climate. This chapter roots its critique in Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*, a utopian allegory of communal living whose Indigenous erasure, appropriation, and obsession with establishing a history in the land resonates with back-to-the-land movements today. The chapter suggests alternatives to this fallow imagination: Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man* traces the changing political currents of the Mississippi, detailing the racial and environmental exploitation associated with the US settler state, as it drifts between, but is contained by, liberal transcendental utopianism and the metaphysics of Indian hating. John Rollin Ridge’s *The Life and Times of Joaquin Murieta*, the first novel by a Native author (Cherokee), narrates the shifting national boundaries of the Mexican-

American war and reveals the transnational politics of national “commons” must be understood as the simultaneity of settler colonial pursuit of, or race for, land with the defining of racial categories. Both these novels appear at the exact same moment as the first acknowledged mention of climate change in George Perkins Marsh’s 1847 “Address” re-characterizes the commons as a dystopic wasteland. Together, these three texts reveal utopian communalism and the commons to be forms of the “big con,” fraudulent settler utopias made “common” through newly criminal categories, racial exclusion, and industrial environmental extraction. These allegories, rather than just re-enthroning settler sovereignty through supposedly inclusive utopian terms, lay bare the U.S. Settler state’s “Stealing, speculation, appropriation [to be] all the corollaries of ownership in the settler colony” (Bhandhar 74). Thus, they form a triune of transnational environmental justice literature that refuses to environ the settler state and that must inform how we think about “our planet,” the allegorical imaginations of the planet as a person, and the “theft of the commons” today.

Chapter IV, “Containing Natures: The American Apocalypse and Unsettling the Emergency,” attends to the ways the American apocalypse genre fences, or contains, racial anxieties. Grounded in the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, this chapter shows how the racialized apocalyptic rhetoric of the moment is linked to an enlargement in whiteness intimately tied to questions of land. The apocalyptic anxieties must be understood in relation to the extension of the institution of private land ownership, what Moreton-Robinson calls the meting out of “private property rights via the prism of citizenship” first federalized in the Homestead Acts and then legally extended to Indigenous peoples through the 1887 Dawes Act. Mere moments after the Ghost Dance movement’s refusal

of private property further unveiled the brutality of US settler “civilization” at Wounded Knee, the US turned to transnational “frontiers,” the Chinese Exclusion Act, and biopolitical categories of race to further contain the settler state’s racial panic. In this context, Chapter III reads the paradigmatic text of environmental history, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, as an apocalypse narrative that unveils the state of emergency underwriting Western sovereignty. This chapter argues (Bodéwademi) Simon Pokagon’s “Red Man’s Rebuke”—a booklet disseminated before Turner’s thesis and its oral version contesting Turner’s tropes only months after—offers an indictment of the apocalyptic structure of settler sovereignty and thus offers a text vital for the environmental canon. Given the frequency of apocalyptic rhetoric describing climate change, it is urgent that we decipher between apocalyptic stories of emergence that actually imprison us in the atmospheres of climate chaos and those accounts of the apocalypse that unveil other futures outside the tropo-spheres of settler sovereignty’s extinction imperative. In truth, these stories are unfinished, which means they can be written differently.

This genealogy shows that concepts of nature and nation perennially animate white supremacy. In order to discern and dismantle this complex, the first half of this project offers an archive of nineteenth-century American literature capable of imagining beyond the futures put in motion by people who thought genocide, slavery, and environmental extraction were acceptable social relations. This archive suggests long and vibrant histories of environmental justice in literature that challenges the exclusionary violence and environmental degradation of settler colonial cum racial capitalism. It also responds to what some have deemed a contemporary “crisis of imagination”—the

supposedly pervasive failure to conceive the end of capitalism or the full implications of climate change<sup>46</sup>—to suggest that there are annals of North American writing that imagine worlds outside the extinction imperatives implicit to settler colonial capitalism. Through the genreological method, we see not just the ways specific stories environ the settler state but the radical potential of literary genre to unsettle those racial and environmental violences in ways deeply relevant to our contemporary crises.

### **Genrecide: Chapters V-VI Overview**

The second half of this project gleans genreology's lessons to theorize genrecide - how literary genre can be used to destroy the plots of white supremacy, unfence our imaginations from the pales of white possession, and imagine beyond the end of the settler state. Genrecide is a concept based on but diverging from adrienne maree brown's coining in *Emergent Strategy*.<sup>47</sup> In her book, Brown refers to genrecide as the use of genre to “disrupt the single white male hero narrative” and intentionally blur the fictional boundaries that shape our worlds, (163).<sup>48</sup> Brown's focus on the relationship between real life and literary genre, and her attention to the disruptive potential of that work, is vital to troubling any fixed relationship between the idea of race and nature especially as it is embedded in the American environmental imagination. Building on brown, genrecide recognizes the capacity of literary genre to function, instead, as an intrusion of convention that shatters the ties between race and nature, as Cedric Robinson describes. Robinson writes, “Race is mercurial - deadly and slick. And since race is presumably

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<sup>46</sup> Frederic Jameson and Amitav Ghosh, respectively, are among the most referenced in these invocations.

<sup>47</sup> I have been able to locate only two other uses of the term “genrecide”—one in the title of a 1996 book of poems by Adeena Karasick and the other of the same title a 1993 album compilation by various artists.

<sup>48</sup> In this way, genrecide is an example of what Frederick Buell, in his critique of environmental apocalypse discourse, argues - that to blur “the boundaries between the dilemmas in fiction and dilemmas still very much in progress in the surrounding world” is one way to affect a more just and sustainable world (322).

natural, the intrusion of convention shatters race's relationship to the natural world" (4). Race and its supposedly naturalness, *is* deadly. And it survives through generic plots. Given this, genrecide uses the intrusion of the conventions of literary genre to shatter the deadly racial conventions that have been and are still being naturalized into our environmental imaginations. Genrecide regards literary genre as a tool employed in the technologies of settler colonialism to author destruction, which can instead be used to annihilate white innocence to support the survival of our human and non-human kin.

Genrecide is an ironic term for an ironic mode. In the fecundity of irony, a suffix that denotes death signifies a mode of survivance by destroying the death-drive of white possession. Thus the term refers to the capacity of literary genres to function as weapons of mass destruction *and* mass instruction—to “kill the settler, save the land,” where genre unsettles the innocence of white settler sovereignty *and* formalizes futures outside the toxic atmospheres of CO2lonialism. The genrecidal archives that this project builds are defined by their antiracist, anti-capitalist environmentalisms grounded in intersectional critiques of private property which expand our notions of environmental justice literature to include imaginations that exist before, after, and beyond settler space time.

Chapter V, “Genrecide: Survivance Ecology and an Indigenous Politics of Literary Genre,” uncovers the ways that Native American writers throughout the twentieth century use genres closely associated with Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis to re-member alternative and unfenceable sovereignties—quite literally to add members back into our histories of American environmental justice movements. This chapter follows Charles Eastman (Santee Dakota), Mourning Dove (Okanogan), John Oskison (Cherokee), D'Arcy McNickle (Cree/Salish), and John Joseph Matthews (Osage) as they

remake genres such as the Western frontier romance to contest US exceptionalism and its coordinated systems of racial and environmental exploitation. The portion of the chapter on John Joseph Matthews has been published in *Western American Literature* but joins the other authors mentioned to exemplify what Byrd theorizes: that “the literatures that American Indian authors produce disrupt and resist the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning generic conventions against affiliations” (Byrd, “Red Fictions” 347). Just as the 1964 Wilderness Act featured universal language that refused to recognize the realities of racial inequalities driving the Civil Rights Act of that same year, both predate the Indian Civil Rights Act by four years. This lag is a paradigmatic example of Indigenous erasure, and the power of Indigenous history for fusing the links between racial formation and environmental extraction held are too often held separate in settler sovereignty’s plots.

I analyze the novels in Chapter V for the ways they suggest a set of characteristics that draws on Gerald Vizenor’s key concept of survivance in conversation with foundational theorizations of environmental literary theory. From these texts, this chapter theorizes “survivance ecology” as an anticolonial literary mode vital to environmental justice histories and presents. Survivance ecology is a mode of narrative that hails the reader in the meaning-making process, regards language as a self-conscious act, and is characterized by irony, nonhierarchical survival, and anti-heroics marked by failure and rule-breaking. Through these authors, survivance ecology offers a mode of story-making that extends beyond generic boundaries and refuses the fences associated with Western political forms, even as they are naturalized through the expectations associated with



particular literary genres. Survivance ecology then is a narrative mode of survival that emerges ironically through genrecide, a mode capable of being expressed in any genre but one that articulates forms of sovereignty unfenced by the extinction-drives of settler colonial capitalism.

Chapter VI, “Genrecide: Survivance Ecology and the Apocalyptic Crisis in Climate Fiction,” takes the past, present, and futures of survivance ecology to contemporary considerations of climate fiction. It brings the work of genreology and genrecide to bear on what is has been recently referred to as the apocalyptic crisis of climate change in its fictional form. Where discussions of climate change often assume the social structures, historical and present, of racial difference will be erased through environmental upheaval, I assert the inextricability of histories of environmental apocalypse and racial formation from contemporary climate change concerns. Apocalyptic stories too often remain inside the pales of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism’s choking atmosphere, naturalizing US settler colonial capitalism as seemingly ubiquitous, like the air we breathe. In this way, using the lens of apocalypse to narrate environmental futures can make histories of power irrelevant, ignoring those crying “I can’t breathe” while constricting our imaginative capacity to claims that climate change will supposedly be like nothing we have ever experienced before. In truth, the apocalypse’s state of emergency belongs to a history of settler colonial structures found in the frontier, extractive industries, and racialized fear. Thus, apocalyptic appeals are prone to protect the violent pollutions of exhaustive, exhausting, and extractive logics that we need them to dismantle. I show how environmental apocalypse narratives represent and repeat the suffocating failures of settler states of emergency, as in the Ian McEwan’s *Solar*, or

model survivance through them, as in Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*. Building on the genrealogy of environmental apocalypse in Chapter IV, Chapter VI unveils a genrecide of the apocalypse's state of emergency structure that destroys the anthropocentric CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism at the root of climate change's attendant apocalyptic realities.

### **Unfenceable Sovereignities**

Through the genrealogy and genrecide of this project, we find literary traditions that story the shared and mutually dependent survival of the human and non-human in ways that exceed the death-drives associated with Western sovereignty. These literatures are emblematic of the ways the term sovereignty still evokes self-determination, jurisdictional authority, and has been used as a "rallying cry for what Native nations want and what Native scholarship should support," despite the highly contested nature of the concept (Teves, et. al. 3). While some argue the notion cannot be disarticulated from the Western political formation that is itself inextricable from colonialism and settler state violence, deception, and exploitation predicated on the erasure or subversion of Indigenous life ways, sovereignty remains one of the most important terms for thinking through Indigenous peoples and their relationships to land.<sup>49</sup> This project aims to amplify the ways in which narrative modes can support Indigenous survivance beyond, outside, and in excess of Western sovereignty, modes that story the ongoing survival and self-determination of the lives that the settler state seeks to erase.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the debates, positions, and stakes of these conversations, see *Native Studies Keywords*.

<sup>50</sup> Sovereignty is, in Kirby Brown's definition for *Western American Literature*, tribal nations' "active, five hundred-year-old struggles for survival, continuance, resistance, and resurgence" that can manifest in territorial, political, economic, intellectual, representational, visual, cultural, rhetorical, sitcom, selfhood, erotic, embodied, temporal, and "a host of other conceptual framings" (83).

Through genrecide, I uncover a critical environmental justice tradition that narrates the sovereignties that thinkers like LeAnne Simpson and others describe,<sup>51</sup> sovereignties that I detail as unfenceable –anti-confinement, anti-individualist, anti-domestication, decolonizing politic that outwaits—and travels beyond—settler time and space and is enacted *by* and responsible *to* Indigenous life.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, these texts show the urgencies of environmental crisis demand we take seriously the non-metaphoric nature of decolonization, and insist on the centrality of Indigenous land claims, and the histories and presents of land dispossession, to any serious study of environmental issues. It understands literary genre as a primary site where these unfenecable sovereignties are enacted, as practices that, in the words of Leanne Simpson, disrupt “the capitalist industrial complex and the colonial gender systems (and a multitude of other institutions and systems) within settler nations” (87).<sup>53</sup> This project recognizes the ways that that our - human and nonhuman - shared survival is predicated on the same disruptions these scholars articulate, but wishes to inquire into how to do so without operationalizing Indigenous resurgence purely for non-Native survival.

To do this, this project amplifies into how specific works of literature can imagine relationships beyond the settler state, beyond the domination that many regard as synonymous with (Western) sovereignty, beyond the worlds immediately knowable to

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<sup>51</sup> For Leanne Simpson, land, “Indigenous land, is not capitalism’s land. Simpson is not talking about the land as property within European and North American legal philosophy and practice. She is not referring to land as an inheritable patrilineal estate with intergenerational wealth and castemaking properties. Simpson’s land is both ‘context and process,’ she is referring to a land that defines a mode of relationality and related set of ethics and protocols for lived social responsibilities and governance defined within discrete Indigenous epistemologies. As Vine Deloria Jr. argued in his work, “the epistemological difference that Indigenous land makes in Indigenous governance and society is its designation of responsibilities, not rights” (Barker 7).

<sup>52</sup> N. Scott Momaday’s *Way to Rainy Mountain* details this “long outwaiting” of Indigenous peoples.

<sup>53</sup> This project seeks to amplify practices of decolonization, actions that work toward the literal unsettling of settlers and the repatriation of land. It also wishes to lift up broader notions of anti colonial sovereignty, as Audra Simpson tells of spaces of resistance determined and represented by Indigenous peoples.

white epistemologies. Accordingly, there are aspects of sovereignty and of “land” that survivance ecology supports but does not make knowable to all audiences.<sup>54</sup> I, too, cannot know but can amplify and support. This project acknowledges this unknowability by challenging the “logics of containment” that collapse land into property through stories that regard both the “physical and metaphysical in relation to concepts of place, territory, and home” (Goeman 72). In truth, sovereignty is a verb—a way of being in messy, interdependent motion, to follow Carol Warrior’s moving insight. Keeping company with Warrior, sovereignty is a mode not predicated on the “sovereignty of nature” but on the flexible interdependence of human and non-human relations that acknowledges and honors the non-human as a political actor.<sup>55</sup> It unsettles the settler, and roots relationships in place. It is in this mode of sovereignty that survivance ecology recognizes and animates—the connection of Indigenusness to land, blackness to humanness, femaleness to consent, and any way those terms can cross over and support each other. It articulates ongoing survival that extends beyond the fictional. Unfenceable sovereignties frustrates all sovereignty-making of the settler state, and wrests environmental futurity from the genocidal natures of its Western form. In its place, it relates through a transcendence of generic, geographic, and temporal boundaries to tell of pasts that inform futures that comprise our presents.

The conclusion of this project explores the theoretical implications of literary genrealogy and genrecide, linking its early critical environmental justice archive and the theory of survivance ecology that comes from studying it to a growing body of work that

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<sup>54</sup> Indigenous territory, is what Robert Nichols terms “the social and political order of Indigenous governance and society” and cannot be equated or reduced to the property of European and North American legal philosophy and practice.

<sup>55</sup> See the work of Carol Warrior, Kyle Powys Whyte, and Robin Wall Kimmerer

rejects the racial binaries of settler colonialism. In tentative triangulation, it brings this project's genealogy of white possession in American literature that spans the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries into conversation with theories of survivance and emergence from Indigenous and black and feminist futurisms. To do so, I follow Kyle Powys Whyte's articulation of "Indigenous narrative-making using a conception of spiraling time that can be seen as living science fiction" (225). I place this spiraling time into conversation with Alexis Pauline Gumbs concept of "black feminist time travel," as well as Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown's point that all organizing is science fiction. These scholars suggest that the early and enduring environmental justice canon that this project uncovers constitutes a form of time traveling science fiction. It scrutinizes the structures of, and facilitating escapes from, the pasts, presents, and futures set in motion by white supremacist settler sovereignty *and* adjusting our temporalities beyond the pale horizons built by settler colonial capital, to worlds more just, more abundant, and more resurgent than our own.

This project exposes the logic of "property" to be the keystone in plots of white possession, the fence posts marking land as naturally a white possession, and shows why that matters for contemporary concerns around how to represent climate change. It reveals the crucial role that literary genre plays in cementing those pales, and rehistoricizes the American environmental tradition by attending to an environmental justice model that exists, and has existed, alongside histories that naturalize settler sovereignty. Ultimately, this project models the exigencies of environmental crisis for the recent turn toward racial formation and settler colonialism in American studies. Its environmental critique takes seriously the non-metaphoric nature of decolonization in the

strong and developing academic movements aimed at decolonizing American literary and cultural studies. Insisting on the centrality of Indigenous land claims, alongside the histories and presents of land dispossession, to any serious study of environmental issues, Native writers and thinkers emerge as vibrant environmental justice models well before the environmental justice movement's acknowledged beginnings in the 1980s. Moreover, Native and non-native authors alike use literary genre to interrogate white possession, broadening the canon of environmental justice literature to more explicitly engage with questions of decolonization.

“Unfenceable Sovereignities” highlights the ways canonical American environmental thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau articulate with histories of racial oppression, capitalist violences, and settler colonialist fantasy that find their contemporary material corollaries in the unequal consequences of climate change. Yet, ultimately, this project complicates conventional readings of the American canon that see nineteenth-century writers as merely endorsing land theft, environmental exploitation, and racial hierarchies. Instead, this project seeks to emphasize the political complexity and diversity of social thought, action, and coalition building in nineteenth-century United States, and beyond. Attention to this diversity broadens the canon of American literary environmentalism toward consideration of political formation and issues of race with unambiguous regard to Indigenous writers and tribally specific politics. Where “canon building is empire building,” as Toni Morrison reminds us, it can be reframed, as Madeline Sayet does, to remember that “Building a canon is also building a community.”

Ultimately, “Unfenceable Sovereignities” offers an environmental justice canon capable of building a capacious, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist community

capable of surviving beyond the end of the settler state. This early and enduring environmental justice tradition is full of self-conscious political strategies that dissect the entanglements of race, nature, and industry in settler colonial America, that imagine beyond the extinction imperatives driving contemporary climate chaos, and that are imperative to the project of an explicitly antiracist environmentalism today.

CHAPTER II  
EVASIVE NATURES:  
THE AMERICAN GOTHIC AND ENVIRONMENTALISM'S HAUNTED HISTORY

“Gothicism may define the experience of any culture when the stories it tells about itself do not ring true to the experiences to be had by simply walking about in the landscape.”  
(Morgen, Sanders, and Kapinsky 17)

“The United States is permanently haunted by the slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days. Haunting doesn't hope to change people's perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop.”  
(Eve Tuck & C. Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting” 642)

“Indigenous sovereignty continues through the presence of Indigenous people and their land, haunting the house that Jack(son) built, shaking its foundations and rattling the picket fence.” (Moreton-Robinson 31)

As people and animals flee flooded or fiery homelands, storms ominously surge up coastlines splitting not just buildings but families, bodies, roots, histories apart. These storms that split also adhere. They attach us to the longer, deeper colonial histories haunting global warming and environmental upheaval. They unearth these attachments, for example, when hurricane Irma's winds heaved a dugout canoe ashore on the ravaged coastlines of Florida in 2017. The canoe appeared along what is locally referred to as Florida's 'Space Coast' for its proximity to the Kennedy Space Center and was immediately claimed by the state of Florida, despite the fact its red cedar was the first of its kind to be recorded in Florida (Murphy). Washed up on the edge of a coast now defined by its extraterrestrial colonial ambitions, this canoe is emblematic of the connections between that colonizing desire, the increased frequency and strength of hurricanes, and the enduring history connecting the canoe's possible origins in colonial,



nineteenth century, or modern America.<sup>56</sup> The canoe testifies to climate change as the most recent manifestation of the uninterrupted horrors of settler colonialism's history as well as its seemingly unavoidable futures.

Indeed, the realities of our changing climate are more and more often imagined through the lens of horror and its romantic, uncanny partner: the gothic. Increasingly unstable weather patterns promise more gruesome, haunting, undead consequences: burned or water logged bodies, human and non-humans racked by zombie-diseases, waif-like specters of starvation, irradiated landscapes glowing for millennia alongside the plastic ghosts of long decayed sea life. These images embody the foreboding truth of what Sara L. Crosby warned: "Horror is becoming the environmental norm" (514). Yet, the horror-norm that Crosby describes is nothing new to the lands of what is now called the US.

Just as the Hurricane Irma canoe confirms, the lands and shores of the US nation-state have always been haunted by the unrepressable, uncanny, undoing presence of the nation's traumatic, bloody history. It is a terror-filled truth that the US came into being through genocide, slavery, and environmental exploitation, what Eve Tuck and C. Ree deem "an ongoing horror made invisible by its persistence" (642). These horrifying relations preoccupy US social, political, and geologic landscapes, haunting them with the uncanny doubleness that comes with a nation built on, and in denial of, its horror.<sup>57</sup> As Tuck and Ree insist, "The United States is permanently haunted" by "the relentless

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<sup>56</sup> Brotmarkle reported that a year later, the date of the canoe remains unsolved: "Analysis shows there is a 50% chance the canoe was made between 1640 and 1680. There's a 32% chance it's from between 1760 and 1818, and an 8.6% chance it was created after 1930."

<sup>57</sup> Even geology testifies to the horrors of genocide. Simon and Maslin place the golden spike of the Anthropocene concurrent with colonization of the Americas, as reflected in the carbon record.

remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence" (642). In contrast to tales of eco-horror told in the present progressive, as horror stories *becoming* the norm, the Hurricane Irma canoe testifies to contemporary environmental realities like climate change as instead the present perfect—as always having been the norm—of settler colonial relationships to the environment. Climate change is nothing new. Its current horrors are inherited from US settler sovereignty's genocidal property making logics. However these specters are formalized into a generic forgetting through the American gothic tradition, a forgetting that defines the very beginnings of and persists in the American environmental imagination.

The denial of history is a feature unique to the American gothic, and one that binds the genre to an uncanny American environmental imagination. Where the European gothic genre is consumed with a concern for the return of the past, the American gothic "supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims" (Savoy 167).<sup>58</sup> In this supposed repudiation, the American gothic expresses an ambivalent, haunted, and uncanny relationship to history in its relationship to land, its environmental imagination. The romantic ideas of nature that were and are central to American national identity comprise the materials out of which US settler colonialism has built is haunted house(s) and the landscapes that surround them.<sup>59</sup> The American nature tradition, rooted as it is in

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<sup>58</sup> In Leslie Fielder's formative work, Fielder deems all American literature essentially Gothic because America is an "essentially gothic" culture produced by a civilization driven "to be done with ghosts and shadows" yet the specter of Otherness "haunts the house of national narrative" (144). In "The Rise of the American Gothic," Eric Savoy writes, "The Gothic has stubbornly flourished in the United States. Its cultural role, though, has been entirely paradoxical: an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles of liberty and 'the pursuit of happiness,' a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow" (167).

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it is no surprise that the haunted house is typically imagined as a hybrid of plantation, castle, and New England colonial mansion.

the romantic, both hides and always attests to the horrors of U.S. settler colonialism through its uncanny Gothic landscapes. Where horror signals a visceral confrontation with trauma, its more romantic kin, the gothic is a form of “western fiction-making” emergent with Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and the formation of the United States where trauma is repressed through the “uncanny” (Hogle 5). Freud first formulated the uncanny, *unheimlich*, as the return of the repressed, the unfamiliar familiar, the home made foreign (Berlant 3). Renee Bergland’s work on the national uncanny shows that Freud’s *unheimlich* means the un-homey, and thus represents “the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized, or the decolonized” (11). Bergland joins Priscilla Wald to locate the roots of Freud’s formative concept in the fragility of white national identity. Wald, Bergland, and Freud all show that the uncanny is marked by what it tries to disavow. This denial is especially significant in the context of climate change, as Amitav Ghosh recently stressed, the environmental uncanny signifies “blatant ignoring of the warnings about the precarity of human beings” (32). Together, these theorists suggest the Gothic aspects of the environmental imagination may be as old as the American nature tradition itself (32).

This chapter uncovers the uncanny gothicism lurking in the American environmental imagination through the oft-cited originary text of American environmental and literary traditions, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature*. It then turns to two texts contemporary with *Nature* which make recourse to the gothic in ways that theorize and unsettle the U.S. settler state’s claims to property, possession, and inheritance: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Roger Malvin’s Burial” and William Apess’s “Eulogy on King Philip.” *Nature* shows the ways that settler sovereignty spectralizes,

turning nature into property, property into white possession, history into ghost. Yet, genre also has the power to materialize history, to make history present, to unsettle that possession, to shake its foundation and rattle its fence. Roger Malvin's Burial" reveals the ways the land itself can signify haunted histories, helping us remember the violence of genocide, slavery, and environmental crisis. Apess goes further to show the ways that land itself is an historical agent, that history's haunting extends beyond the fences, pales, of settler sovereignty's mythic past into the historical present. Through these three texts, we are able to clarify the American Gothic's capacity to show what was previously hidden, buried—to unsettle settler sovereignty by revealing or thinking beyond its operations.

Unsettling the settler genre of the American gothic thus opens up an alternative origin story of US environmental literature in Hawthorne and Apess' texts. These gothic texts are infused with modes associated with the hypocrisies of settler colonial history—such as the Jeremiad, the Eulogy, and U.S. legal systems—tying the horror of the past, present, and future realities of Western sovereignty to its extractive settler colonial capitalist economies. In that, they suggest a politically exigent origin for an American environmental literature in an American ecogothic tradition that narrates the rapacious relations of settler sovereignty but also roots its relationships with place as a testament to genocide and Indigenous survival. The ecogothicism of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Apess together provide a robust alternative origin for American environmental thought vital to repairing the eco-horrors brought to light by current climate catastrophes.

## Emerson's *Nature* and the Gothic Environmental Imagination

Emerson's *Nature* instilled a notion of nature ostensibly indispensable for the inauguration of both the American Literary Renaissance and the American environmental tradition. Though critics like Jeffery Meyers have noted the ways that *Nature* displays the cultural attitudes that justify racial discrimination and environmental exploitation, none have attended to how *Nature* betrays a gothicism at the core of the US settler state that also belongs to a canonical version of American environmental tradition which moves through Emerson to Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, and John Muir (18). *Nature*'s nature functions as a process of spectralization that conceals the violence of the extractive US settler state that still hangs like a ghostly specter over American environmental thought. Reading *Nature* as a gothic tale exposes the uncanny doubleness at the core of American national identity, where nature is limitless, ahistorical, palely apolitical, and a synonym for property that cloaks the historical and present specter of white violence. In other words, reading *Nature* as gothic reveals the ways that white violence is coded into the origins of liberal American environmental thinking.

*Nature*'s nature is the immaterial—the mythically inexhaustible nature necessary to the extractive relations of capital. It is, in Russ Castronovo's words, "the famous anti-materialist polemic" that belongs to an inexhaustible natural world (6). The limitless growth that *Nature* inaugurates, Laura Dassow Walls notes, was made to "seem inevitable while rendering the destruction it wrought invisible" (578). Despite the clear associations between *Nature* and a particularly unsustainable regard for the natural world, *Nature* continues to be cited as the origin of American environmentalist thought. What Eric Cheyfitz calls the "uncanny space" of *Nature*'s legacy, then, encodes a boundless

system responsible for the sixth extinction. This system persists, undaunted, in the American environmental tradition and, as critics like Chris Newfield trace, in today's American liberal and neoliberal imaginary (Cheyfitz, "A Common Emerson," 265). Thus, when we locate the beginning of the American environmental tradition with Emerson's text, we ensure the continuance of a particular view of the natural world and living beings in it as natural resources, hiding the horrors that were erased in *Nature* but are felt with increasing frequency and severity across the world.<sup>60</sup> Rather than not reading it, however, we must attend to the history that haunts Emerson's gothic text and the ways that its erasure operates.

*Nature's* regard for history marks the text as decidedly gothic. It narrates a history-less American national identity which has fundamentally shaped American concepts of "nature," conservation, and race. The American gothic genre is often known by a disavowal of history and a fear of repressed violence returning. *Nature* displays this simultaneous disregard and obsession with history. *Nature* opens with the question, "Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past?," dismissing the ways those bones bear witness to the uncanny realities at the heart of American national, and "natural," settler sovereignty. Renee Bergland sees Emerson's *Nature* as indicative of the American national gothic tradition, as a text that uses the gothic "rhetoric of ghostliness" to frame a denunciation of history (33). Though Bergland does not expound on Emerson, nor interrogate the connection between *Nature* and the American environmental tradition, her work suggests an intimate connection between the American gothic tradition, this as the originary work of American environmental thinking, and the social turmoil, racial politics, or environmental politics of its moment.

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<sup>60</sup> Dassow Walls argues that Emerson's theory of nature "made Kyoto necessary" (582).

*Nature* displays none of the political expressions often associated with Emerson's other writings in protest of slavery and Cherokee Removal. Instead, the text is disengaged from the politics that surround it, making it a startlingly and problematic origin for American environmental thinking. In fact, from Nat Turner's revolt and Black Hawk's war inside its borders to the Christmas Rebellion in Jamaica, in the five years leading up to *Nature*, resistance to the US settler state were everywhere manifest in both insurrectionary and legal forms. The Cherokee Nation authored its own constitution establishing itself as a sovereign nation, a document that inspired events just 70 miles from Emerson's home only three years before *Nature* was published. In 1833, just down the coast from Boston, the Mashpee drafted their Declaration of Independence. Drawing on language from Cherokee and US precedents, the document continued the Mashpee tradition of using the logic of "title" so dear to the US settler state to assert and protect their territory.<sup>61</sup> The declaration established the Mashpee as a sovereign nation that would refuse settler encroachment as of July 1, 1833. On that day, in what came to be known as the Mashpee Revolt but would be better termed an instance of settler insurgency, settlers promptly violated the legal document by attempting to steal wood. The Mashpee met the settlers and unloaded their carts. Those Mashpee involved were arrested and convicted for "riot, assault, and trespass" (Konkle 124). This ruling contradicted the Marshall Trilogy that, through the notion of domestic dependency, codified the historical rights of occupancy, limited sovereignty, and immunity from state authority to Native peoples

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<sup>61</sup> The Mashpee peoples understood the slippery notion of "title" as the lynchpin to legalizing settler theft since well before the US legal code formalized it. In 1665, Wampanoag leaders deeded the land to Indians "forever; so not to be given, sold, or alienated from them by anyone with all their Consents thereunto." Despite this use of U.S. legal logic, in the eighteenth century US General Court incorporated Mashpee as a "plantation" and appointed white overseers who proved unsurprisingly corrupt. Settlers continued to encroach.

(ibid.). Emerson's *Nature* acknowledges none of these contestations to American nationhood, nature, or territorial sovereignty, dismissing the bloody history as mere dry, irrelevant bones.

*Nature* instead erases America's historical and ongoing violences, its foundation of land theft and slavery, through a gothic denial that, too, underwrites the American environmental tradition. After dismissing the dry bones, Emerson's transcendental manifesto disavows his "retrospective" age as an era that "builds sepulchers of the fathers" (214).<sup>62</sup> In this grave disavowal, Emerson dismisses America's colonial history, rehashing a Revolutionary rhetoric that cast settlers as people colonized by Britain. This colonizer-as-colonized takes on even more sinister tones as Emerson explains away the blood-soaked land that those settler sepulchers are dug into with the rhetoric of pastoral escapism. Instead of the burial plots of history—"the dry bones of the past"—Emerson offers the woods of "perpetual youth" (217). He declares that, in these "plantations of God," all social relations are leveled, as "to be brothers, to be acquaintances, - master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance" (217). Here, Emerson regards brutal power differentials of master-servant as mere "disturbance" in the zombie-like "perpetual youth" of the plantation, rehearsing the notions of nature as pastoral plantation or pristine wild that mask US settler histories of slavery and Indigenous genocide, according to scholars like Paul Outka and William Cronon.<sup>63</sup> In like manner, *Nature*'s insistence on history as nothing more than inconsequential grave-tending whitewashes a burgeoning American environmental nationalism rooted in the conservation of a white nature.

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<sup>62</sup> Transcendentalism was itself born out of a German nationalist project, as Nell Irvin Painter shows.

<sup>63</sup> See Outka, Cronon, and the extended footnote in the introduction to this project.



As the first text of American environmental thought, *Nature's* negations exemplify the connection between the American environmental tradition and the violent pales of white settler sovereignty.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, just as Nell Irvin Painter calls Emerson “the philosopher king of American white race theory” and turns to Emerson’s 1856 *English Traits* as exemplary of his racist ideologies, *Nature*, too, must be understood as the paradigmatic text that roots the racism associated with German romanticism into the American environmental imagination (Wimborne).<sup>65</sup> Nature is, in *Nature*, “the high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will... Every natural action is graceful. Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the places and bystanders to shine” (220). Here, nature functions tautologically - what is natural is graceful and heroic and what is heroic shines graceful and decent over all the places and bystanders that might attest differently. Here, we find nature a synonym for human will and heroism, anticipating Teddy Roosevelt’s masculine conservation of the twentieth-century in the literary paradigm of the president of the time.

*Nature* metaphorizes what President Andrew Jackson signed into law - the link between whiteness and the American environmental imagination.<sup>66</sup> Jackson signed the first environmental conservation legislation effort only two years after signed the Indian Removal Act which forced the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, Wyandot, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Shawnee, and Lenape nations to move to land west of the Mississippi. On April 20, 1832 Jackson signed legislation protecting four

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<sup>64</sup> For the use of the word pale, see page 12 of the Introduction.

<sup>65</sup> Brian Wimborne links contemporary “green politics” to German romanticism and its racial ideologies.

<sup>66</sup> Emerson commented on Andrew Jackson many times in his journals, stating that “Jackson is more powerful than John Marshall” given his ability to ignore the supreme court ruling and signed the Indian Removal Act which forced the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, Wyandot, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Shawnee, and Lenape nations.

sections of land around what is now known as Hot Springs, Arkansas (Spence). This after his removal policy willfully ignored the Marshall trilogy, a set of rulings that translated Native peoples' relations to land through the terms of "Anglo-American property law," using the doctrine of discovery to grant settlers the right of "title" to Native lands and render Native peoples "domestic dependent nations" with diminished sovereignty and no legal land claims (Cheyfitz, "Savage Law," 110).<sup>67</sup> This simultaneity exemplifies how, in Eric Cheyfitz's words, "property plots the narrative" connecting the US nation, land claims, and *Nature* as they work together to secure white settler claims to Indigenous lands (Ibid. 116). Nature, in *Nature*, is the language of the nation- where "Long hereafter, amidst agitation and terror in national councils, - in the hour of revolution, - these solemn images shall reappear in their morning luster, as fit symbols and words of the thoughts which the passing events shall awaken" (225). In its national-historical context, this nature is the morning luster of the nation just awakening - narrating the vistas of, in the words of Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, "Andrew Jackson's White Republic" (95). Through *Nature*, we see conservation and Removal as not a contradiction in terms but the very (haunted white) plots on which it stands. *Nature* uncannily mirrors the ways both nature and nation were (and still are) imagined as a white project through a disavowal of history. In this erasure, the plots of the text's gothicism materializes.

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<sup>67</sup> Three cases comprise what are commonly referred to as the "Marshall trilogy": In *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), the Supreme Court claimed the federal government held title to Indian lands because the lands were "discovered" by Europeans making Indian right to their land limited. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), the Supreme Court ruled the Cherokee's relationship with the U.S. government as that of a ward to its guardian. However, the following year the Supreme Court reversed its in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), ruling to state Indian tribes were indeed sovereign and immune from state laws. In the last of the trilogy, the Supreme Court ruled that state laws did not extend to Indian Country and deemed Indian "domestic dependents." The era of the Marshall trilogy also includes Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal policy of 1830, a policy that violated the Supreme Court's decision establishing Native sovereignty.

*Nature* buries the terror of white settler sovereignty through a notion of history-less nature at the uncanny core of American white national identity. In this, the text puts forward a race theory through erasure. As we know from Ernst Renan and others, the erasure and forgetting of the foundational violence of the nation-state is the key to national and colonial power. “Forgetting,” Renan writes, “I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation” (n.p.). This forgetting has a specific liberal and white shape, as Lisa Lowe’s work reminds us, one whose “freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting” (207).<sup>68</sup> The haunting erasure that Lowe describes defines what Toni Morrison tells us is an American literary whiteness. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison shows that “For the most part, the literature of the United States has taken as its concern the architecture of a new white” (14-15). Morrison’s description of this literary whiteness captures the gothic heart of texts like *Nature*:

What was distinctive in the New was, first of all, its claim to freedom and, second, the presence of the unfree within the heart of the democratic experiment - the critical absence of democracy, its echo, shadow, and silent force in the political and intellectual activity of some not-Americans. (48)<sup>69</sup>

Morrison’s word choice echoes Leslie Fielder’s formative claim that “all fiction of the West is almost essentially a gothic one” because of the nightmarish quality of the American dream (124). *Nature* proves that concepts of ‘nature’ are key to what Lowe, Morrison, and Fielder show is America’s racially-haunted gothic. In this, the text is

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<sup>68</sup> Jodi Byrd critiques Lowe for “collapsing the indigenous Americas into slavery” (xxv). In contrast, Eric Cheyfitz’s “A Common Emerson” concludes that, “both liberal ideology and the critique of liberal ideology are both powerfully represented in Emerson” (28).

<sup>69</sup> Though Morrison is describing Emerson’s “American Scholar” in her analysis of the whiteness that haunts the American literary tradition, it could as well have been a study of *Nature* in relation to the gothic.

exemplary of an uncanny American literary whiteness expressed through nature, refusing the past at the same time as it is possessed by an unshakable threat of its retribution.

The primary way *Nature* affects such amnesia is by conflating nature with property. By asserting nature-as-property, *Nature* confers authority from history to white settler sovereignty. First, Emerson's essay asserts that nature and property serve the same purpose. According to *Nature*, property functions like nature in that both work to "discipline us toward intellectual truths" (227). One of those 'truths' is that property is the most advanced location in nature's teleology: "We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual in it. Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will" (220).<sup>70</sup> One only has to emphasize words like "great actions," "rational creature," and "his dowry and estate" to witness the ways that a universal nature-as-property becomes a means by which sovereignty can be moved from its royal European model of inheritance ("dowry and estate") to a heroic white, male, settler whose "great actions" and Anglo-American property-holding crown him.

In this metaphorical marriage of nature and property, *Nature* makes explicit the translation that Eric Cheyfitz notes is implicit in *Nature* and at the heart of colonization (*Poetics* 27). Indeed, *Nature*'s nature-as-property functions as a bridge for sovereignty to be transferred from imperial to individual. Emerson emphasizes, "Nature is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful" (228). Here, Emerson analogizes the Jesus as the King of the Jews in way that transfers such royalty to the "man" who is shaping all of nature's resources for his own

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Buell reminds readers that Emerson "downplayed the violence and rapacity of the so-called civilizing process as an inevitable stage of evolution to something better," where property functions as the end goal (186).

use. Through this implied succession, “man,” or what John Muir later calls “Lord Man” without noting its racial dimension, signifies the theological heart of sovereignty transferred onto the white property holding male.<sup>71</sup> In this, *Nature* performs the ways white settler sovereignty is secured and made invisible through inheritance laws (Alcoff 27). Throughout the text, *Nature* announces the white settler sovereign with a crown made of fenceposts and property titles.<sup>72</sup> Thus, *Nature* epitomizes what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls “possessive logics” that allow “white sovereignty to remain transparent and invisible” (81). This invisibility cloaks the terrifying truth of white US settler violence through appeals to private property. The possessive logics of property sublimate and spectralize history offering a paradigmatic case of what Cheyfitz argues: that property signals the limits of history in America (“Savage Law” 111). In order to move beyond the limits of Emerson’s own social and cultural position, Cheyfitz’s calls for ethnohistoricizing the author and text (“A Common Emerson” 261). As ethnohistory, we are able to see the ways that *Nature* uses nature-as-property to render history nothing more than bones to build white settler colonial capital upon.

*Nature*’s nature-as-property conflation hides the systematic and invisible social and literal death of Native peoples and African Americans that is inextricable from the

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<sup>71</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff shows that whiteness filled in a gap in the transfer of sovereignty from a royal to a popular model. Here, Emerson’s *Nature* helps us link that to nature in the American mind (Alcoff 11). Wendy Brown’s *Walled States* reveals the theological core of Western sovereignty, while Cheyfitz shows that Locke implicitly translated the bible to suggest, “in the beginning was property,” linking possession and property through the concept of “title” (Cheyfitz *Poetics* 55). Moreover, Black studies has shown ways that the “human” or “man” actually signifies a racial hierarchy, a recent example can be found in Alexander Weheliye’s *Habeas Viscus*, which reminds us that, “as an object of knowledge, whiteness designates not actually existing groupings but a series of hierarchical power structures that apportion and delimit which members of the *Homo sapiens* species can lay claim to full human status” (19).

<sup>72</sup> The very mark of property, for Locke, was first the title then the fence (Cheyfitz *Poetics* 55).

protection and possession of white nature through the prism of property.<sup>73</sup> While Locke's famous formulation asserted property grew from mixing land with labor, Cheryl Harris reminds us that Locke's notion of property is more accurately understood as whiteness-as-property.<sup>74</sup> Harris shows that whiteness becomes a form of property through the appropriation of stolen Indigenous land and the labor extracted through the enslavement of black bodies. Building on Harris, George Lipitz calls the assumed, invisible, or expected nature of white entitlement the "possessive investment in whiteness," a regard for property that entitles, or uses "title" to turn people into property relations.<sup>75</sup> Further, as Locke argued that every man has property in his own person, Grace Kyungwon Hong intervenes to show that Locke defined property *and* personhood as both implicitly white. Hong, Lipitz, Harris, and others add important dimension to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's claim that the nation is a white possession. *Nature* provides a paradigmatic reminder of Cheyfitz's words that, in the US settler state, "property plots the narrative" ("Savage Law" 116). Importantly, plot can mean narrative, territory, and strategic intent and also burial.<sup>76</sup> Emerson's *Nature* shows the ways that property plots the narrative in all four ways: through historical forgetting, territorial claims, tactical targeting, and burial spaces, white settler sovereignty plots its fences, gothically disavowing but still haunted by the "dry bones of the past."

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<sup>73</sup> For more on how "disavowal allows such political imaginaries to erase its racial and colonial brutalities and thus legitimate its self definition as defenders of freedom and protectors of political life," see Grace Kyungwon Hong's *Death Beyond Disavowal*.

<sup>74</sup> See John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* and astute analysis of the settler and colonial logic therein in Patrick Wolfe's *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* and Chad Luck's *The Body of Property: Antebellum Fiction and the Phenomenology of Possession*.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Cheyfitz describes "title" as the supreme term that translated Indigenous relationships to land through property law.

<sup>76</sup> Rob Nixon's "Neoliberalism, Genre, and the 'Tragedy of the Commons'" cunningly and punningly analyzes Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" for its "disinheritance plot" that "draws together notions of narrative, property, and strategic intent," a set of meanings to which I add the notion of burial.

Thus, *Nature* typifies the ways the American gothic articulates (and often buries) the uncanniness of white possession internal to settler colonialism. Even by the text's own account, white possession is undeniably uncanny: "More and more, with every thought, does his kingdom stretch over things until the world becomes, at last, only a realized will, - *the double of the man*" (228, emphasis mine). This doubling that Emerson describes is uncanny, as the will of Lord Man reduces the kingdom of *Nature* to nothing but an immaterial double of itself.<sup>77</sup> The doubleness of the uncanny, in the play between the *unheimlich* and *heimlich*, the unhoused and the housed or where the foreign exists inside the domestic, is an uncanny feature of the US settler state exemplified in *Nature*. Indeed, *Nature* was written at the exact moment that America doubled itself, deeming Native peoples "domestic dependent nations" whose "necessarily diminished" sovereignty signifies their status as both foreign to and inside of the US nation-state (Cheyfitz xiii).<sup>78</sup>

When read in the context of the American Gothic, *Nature*'s history-less, limitless nature-as-property begins to look more and more like a sublimation of the violences of settler sovereignty where the uncanniness of white possession is revealed in all its anxiety-ridden pallor. Given *Nature*'s status as the originary document of American environmental and literary tradition, *Nature*'s nature indexes the racial undercurrents of Locke's property-plot in a way that exposes the gothic undertones of American national, environmental, and literary traditions. *Nature* makes clear that in order to build a more

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<sup>77</sup> Cheyfitz reads Emerson's *Nature* as capturing the contradictions of the Enlightenment by juxtaposing Western idealism and imperialism through the struggle between kinship and domination ("A Common Emerson" 9-10).

<sup>78</sup> Cheyfitz notes that sovereign Indian communities were deemed "domestic dependent" which translated Indian communities into an oxymoronic phrase, "into political space *between* the domestic and the foreign." In other words, after the Marshall Trilogy, the Indian is a remainder, an excess, an unassimilable Other, or, in the terms of this argument, translated into an uncanny double of the US nation itself.

effective and just environmental imagination today, we must inquire into the ways that property plots both the narratives and natures of whiteness. This requires a dissection of the American environmental tradition, but also an expansion of the canon we consider originary to it.

### **Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial" and Uncanny Inheritance**

Though *Nature* relies on nature-as-property to conceal the "dry bones of the past," other texts of the time attempt to answer the haunting questions that *Nature* buries.

Written, like Emerson's *Nature*, at the moment that America doubled itself via the Marshall Trilogy, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial" is a story obsessed with how the sins of the father get passed on, a narrative preoccupied with inherited plots. Hawthorne's dark romanticism is commonly associated with allegory, gothicism, and explorations of ancestral sin, all of which characterize "Roger Malvin's Burial."

However, most critics read the story in relation to Hawthorne's psychological explorations, rather than regarding Hawthorne's only frontier tale in relation to his historical moment, its frontier environmental ethos.

"Roger Malvin's Burial" is comprised of two seemingly disconnected portions: a short historical frame that sets the tale immediately after the 1725 Lovewell's Fight, and an overtly fictional account that follows. The story portion follows two wounded men, Roger Malvin and Reuben Bourne, as they return home after the battle that the historical frame describes. Roger, Reuben's father-in-law to be, convinces Reuben to leave him to die so that Reuben may make it home and marry his daughter, Dorys. Reuben agrees and promises to come back one day and bury Roger. When Reuben arrives home, he tells Dorys that he already buried her father. Reuben is regarded a hero by Dorys and the



community, but he is haunted by his broken promise and dishonesty. His guilt eventually leads him to leave with his family to settle on the frontier. En route, Roger shoots at what he thinks is a deer only to find his teenage son lying dead next to the dry unburied bones of Roger Malvin.

While Hawthorne's single frontier story could be easily understood as a different setting for the same psychological guilt many read in his other works, the tale is more critical than cognitive. The story provides an important meta-commentary on the American Gothic's relationship to history. Where the gothic genre is historiographic, a genre obsessed with the writing of history and consumed with a concern for the return of the past, the American Gothic has an ambivalent, haunted relationship to history as US settler sovereignty "supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims" (Savoy 167).<sup>79</sup> It is within this historiographic tension that "Roger Malvin's Burial" must be understood. The gothic historiography of "Roger Malvin's Burial" rests in what Lauren Berlant calls Hawthorne's "counter national symbolic," its simultaneous obsession with and refusal of history (34). Though Berlant does not discuss this particular story, the story is consistent with Berlant's work in the "link between the symbolic logos of the gothic and the construction of national identity" but insists that settler sovereignty be inserted into Berlant's allegorical study (45). The story allegorizes the ways that US settler sovereignty plots—narrates, schemes, territorializes, and buries—the brutality of its

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<sup>79</sup> Eric Savoy writes, "The Gothic has stubbornly flourished in the United States. Its cultural role, though, has been entirely paradoxical: an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles of liberty and 'the pursuit of happiness,' a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow" (167).

occupation.<sup>80</sup> Through the gothic trope of uncanny doubling, where history is fiction and fiction is history, the story exposes the racial and environmental anxieties lurking in the history and narratives of U.S. settler sovereignty. The story uses the history, narratives, and environmental symbols most often marshaled for the innocence-making project of U.S. settler conquest, but it does so to expose the bounds of US settler sovereignty—historical or otherwise—as the pales of white possession. In this, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” offers a more critical mode of the uncanny to our American environmental tradition.

At the outset, the story insinuates its uncanny history, in title and narrative frame. “Roger Malvin’s Burial” is an ironic designation for a story about someone haunted by the *unburied* corpse of Roger Malvin. As the entire story revolves around the lack of burial for Roger Malvin, the title of the story hints at what the story is not. This, then, instead suggests an opposite: the story of what *should* have been buried. In this titling of what it is not, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” troubles the idea that a “title” offers any stable claim at all, a profound comment if read in the context of the first ruling in the Marshall trilogy, the 1823 case of *Johnson v. McIntosh* which gave the federal government title to all Indian lands because Europeans had “discovered” them. While it may be too far to suggest that the title intended such an allusion, the story lays claim to a burial it never carries out, just as US claims title to Native lands based on a discovery that never was. “Roger Malvin’s Burial” is thus a title for a story about the failure to bury something which announces the irony of a title’s claim to anything. The title doubles itself. In this

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<sup>80</sup> In this, Hawthorne’s gothic tale is a national allegory as Jameson defines the genre, despite its geographical distance from Jameson’s “third world.” Jameson claims that all “third world” literature can be read as national allegory because its central desire is to narrate the experience of colonialism and imperialism. “Roger Malvin’s Burial” follows Jameson’s national allegory as colonial experience leads to an “allegorical spirit” that is “profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol” (73).

way, the story's title reverberates in its historical moment, introducing an uncanny echo chamber of settler deception haunted by its obsession with possession.

The opening frame establishes the uncanniness of the story only suggested at in the title. While some scholars have deemed the setting irrelevant based on the lack of obvious connection between the historical frame and the narrative,<sup>81</sup> the gap between the frame and the fiction mirrors the American Gothic's uncanny relationship with history, as they both repress but are haunted by the past. The frame thus serves as the cipher for the entire story. Where the uncanny is the familiar made strange as the threat of the unhoused unsettles what is repressed, in the context of U.S. settler colonialism, familiar historical narratives are haunted by the unsettling truth that "the place settlers call home is not really theirs and a sense that their current legitimacy ... might well be predicated on theft, fraud, violence, and other injustices in the past" (Cariou 727-8). The American national uncanny is, in Renee Bergland's titular work, "telling the story of a triumphant American aesthetic that repeatedly transforms horror into glory, national dishonor into national pride" (22). While Bergland's *National Uncanny* regards Hawthorne's work as exemplary of "repressive national culture," "Roger Malvin's Burial"—a text Bergland does not discuss—exemplifies the uncanny Bergland describes with profound implications for American environmental thinking. The gap between the historical frame and the

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<sup>81</sup> David Levin declares that "Hawthorne's story itself has virtually nothing to do with Lovewell's Fight," though he still sees the story as one of Hawthorne's most "ironically critical of the self-deceptive lies about Puritan crimes" (149, 284). Indeed, the ambivalence of the story's central concerns lends itself to contradiction like those in Levin's conclusions and to disagreements among critics. The critic that comes closest to reading the story as national allegory is Michael J. Colacurcio, who declares the story a psychological allegory critiquing "the heroic lies of American historians and the pastoral delusions of American mythologists [that] have 'blasted' the scion of destiny and blighted what might have been" (126). Colacurcio argues the story implies "not so much the crime of genocidal 'supplantation' as the failure to face the brutal facts of American survival, from colony to province," the "unlovely truth about their national experience" (120). However, for Colacurcio, the "brutal facts" or "unlovely truth[s]" are nothing more than "semi-tacit (or semi-deliberate) dishonesty" (121). Yet, the allegory of the story extends far beyond an individual's psychological consequences of minor moral infractions like "semi-tacit" deceit. The story's national allegory explores the unconscious depths of American mythos.

fictional account mimics the uncanniness of disconnecting the histories, fictions, and the violences of US settler sovereignty.

Set in 1725, the frame opens on the western frontier right after Lovewell's fight, also known as the Battle of Pequawket and the last major conflict between the English and the Wabanaki Confederacy.<sup>82</sup> Lovewell's fight was memorialized in song, theater, and national mythology at the time of the story's authorship. The opening passage's ambivalence establishes the story as at once a gothic fiction and an allegory of historiography. This uncanny doubleness allegorizes the American Gothic's relationship to history, a literary corollary to US settler sovereignty's "rightful claims" to land. The frame encloses the story within the ambivalent space of historiography. It reads:

One of the few incidents of Indian warfare naturally susceptible of the moonlight of romance was that expedition undertaken for the defence of the frontiers in the year 1725, which resulted in the well-remembered "Lovell's Fight." Imagination, by casting certain circumstances judicially into the shade, may see much to admire in the heroism of a little band who gave battle to twice their number in the heart of the enemy's country. The open bravery displayed by both parties was in accordance with civilized ideas of valor; and chivalry itself might not blush to record the deeds of one or two individuals. The battle, though so fatal to those who fought, was not unfortunate in its consequences to the country; for it broke the strength of a tribe and conduced to the peace which subsisted during several ensuing years. History and tradition are unusually minute in their memorials of their affair; and the captain of a scouting party of frontier men has acquired as actual a military renown as many a victorious leader of thousands. Some of the incidents contained in the following pages will be recognized, notwithstanding the substitution of fictitious names, by such as have heard, from old men's lips, the fate of the few combatants who were in a condition to retreat after "Lovell's Fight."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> This chapter refers to the battle as Lovewell's Fight, in accordance with the name used in U.S. settler history, celebration, and myth, as that seems the primary invocation. However, it aims to use the Battle of Pequawket when referring to the actual people and place of the battle. The Wabanaki Confederacy is a confederation of five First Nations and Native American Nations, the Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot.

<sup>83</sup> Lovell is the early version of the name later formalized as Lovewell. I use Lovewell as it appears more frequently in scholarship. However, I retain the original spelling when mentioned in direct quotes and specific historical markers.

Under the guise of history, the opening sentence wraps the setting in the gauze of gothic frontier tales' territorial obsessions. The first line is typically read in relation to Hawthorne's theory of romance, as articulated in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* as a genre of writing that allowed writers to narrate a "neutral territory" (24).<sup>84</sup> This "neutral territory" is examined in detail by Walter Benn Michaels's classic work "Romance and Real Estate." Benn Michaels asserts that Hawthorne viewed romance as "the text of clear and unobstructed title" (157). Following Benn Michaels, Chad Luck's *The Body of Property* notes that Hawthorne is "writing in the shadow cast by Locke's work on property" (92). These scholars note that Lovewell's fight is an event that carries a double-negative relation to historical fact. It is "*naturally* susceptible of the moonlight of romance," prone to the ghostly haze of light provided by romance's obsession with uncontested titles, dim illuminations that make property appear more "naturally" inalienable.

The events are indeed flagged for the reader as such with the preposition "of," a preposition that suggests accounts of Lovewell's fight were capable of, or liable to, romantic castings that narrate the events in soft but mystifying (moon) light. This regard for Lovewell's fight resonates with "romantic" accounts of the battle that were in high circulation around the time of publication, elaborated below. Thus, in its first line, the story establishes its historical setting while also announcing it as a history bound to, or naturally susceptible of, frontier tales' shady, romantic obsession with free land. The beginning of the story is grounded in the frontier, what Cheyfitz calls a "place of

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<sup>84</sup> "In Hawthorne's view, the romance allows a writer to enter a space where the writer can "mingle" or merge the actual and the ideal. Calling his work "romance" allows Hawthorne to acknowledge that it is a product of the imagination while asserting the validity of the connections it makes between the tangible and the abstract" (Pennell 15).

translation” where history is used as a figurative foundation for settler entitlement (*Poetics* 10). Complimenting the story’s uncanny title, the first line of the story establishes “the moonlight of romance” as a haunting historiography of the waning of unobstructed title claims. This is, the title and opening decree, an American gothic setting.

The second line builds ambiguity on to the story’s initial Gothicism, suggesting history is made through fiction and historical heroes are a matter of subjective, even competing, fictions. The second sentence undercuts the opening sentence’s historicity with the word “imagination.” The succession in the second sentence makes clear that retellings of the historical event are ultimately determined by what is ignored, “by casting certain circumstances judicially into the shade.” The judicial language figures law as a matter of *choice* perhaps motivated by, but not limited to, the shadiness of Lockean private property. The historical frame’s ironic regard for “shady” history becomes the story’s ambiguous core, refusing the hero-obsession so common to such accounts by throwing into question who and what counts as heroic. According to the second sentence, once specific details are ignored, heroes *may* be admired. Who or what constitutes heroism is described through the language of choice, and through double negative—heroes are known only by their antagonistic presence in “the heart of enemy country.” They are first created through selective memory and then through opposition to an enemy. Moreover, there is no indication of any political affiliation other than the vague terms of hero and enemy, an ambiguity that adds to the double meaning of the opening passage especially once we remember that at both the time of publication and at the time of the story’s setting, “enemy country” denoted an impossibly subjective geography (a flexible

geography that persists as “Indian country” in contemporary U.S. military designation).<sup>85</sup> “Roger Malvin’s Burial” buries its tale in the blurred space of settler historical fictions.

The lines that follow add further ambivalence to the already slippery politics of the historical setting. Like the second sentence, any measure of heroism is muted by the “open bravery,” “civilized ideas of valor,” and “chivalry” “displayed by both parties.” The stability of the historical setting is then further undercut through a series of negatives and non-material subjects. The actors are inanimate (chivalry, battle) and act through what they are not: “chivalry *might not* blush,” the battle “was *not unfortunate*.” Through negation, the battle ironically breaks “the strength of a tribe” to “conduce peace”—negatives that mimic the kind of ends-justify-means logic that motivates the battle history fictions ironized by the frame. The opening paragraph emphasizes that familiar accounts from history are necessarily incomplete and subject to interpretation: “History and tradition are unusually minute in their memorials of their affair; and the captain of a scouting party of frontier men *has acquired as actual* a military renown as many a victorious leader of thousands” (*emphasis mine*). In the context of the many celebrations of the fight which were in circulation at the time of the story, describing the historical and traditional accounts with the auto-antonym “minute” suggests the battle as either extremely small or trifling *or* treated in great detail—and neither minute treatment bears direct relation to actual military renown.

The ambivalence of the frame suggests that when historical details are chosen in the context of (U.S. settler) tradition, there may be no difference between historical

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<sup>85</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, among others, notes that the term “Indian Country” is “not merely an insensitive racial slur, tastelessly but offhandedly employed to refer to the enemy. It is, rather, a technical military term, like ‘collateral damage’ or ‘ordinance,’ that appears in military training manuals and is regularly used to mean ‘behind enemy lines’” (57).

details and tradition's trifling memorials. In this satire, factual details of deeds become a trifling concern in the context of US military fictions of heroism (139). According to the story, these celebrations fashion historical truth out of national mythology. Indeed, in other accounts of the battle, Lovewell is shown to be nothing more than a private militiaman and scalp hunter who has, through the distance of time and the alchemy of national narrative, been turned into a military hero (Grenier 54). The passage's end punctuates its historiographic politics, promising that "some of the incidents contained in the following pages will be recognized" but only based on what has been heard "from old men's lips," old men who ostensibly have themselves heard tell of the battle from those few "combatants" who survived. The frame's language refuses stable political affiliation in favor of allegorical slippage between history and fiction.

Through the opening frame, the story's fiction is tethered to historical fact, but the historical fact itself is anchored in fictional subjectivity, tying the narrative and historical threads of "Roger Malvin's Burial" into a knot on a ghosted ship. The ambivalent preface suspends the story in the space *between* political affiliations, a rhetorical corollary to legal realities attending the story's publication that established Native peoples as both inside and outside the boundaries of western sovereignty. The frame's ambivalence uncannily doubles the historical politics contemporaneous with story, suggesting the existence of narratives that haunt the romantic "moonlight" of settler sovereignty.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> To repeat an earlier footnote, Cheyfitz notes that sovereign Indian communities were deemed "domestic dependent" which translated Indian communities into an oxymoronic phrase, "into political space *between* the domestic and the foreign." In other words, after the Marshall Trilogy, the Indian is a remainder, an excess, an unassimilate-able Other, or, in the terms of this argument, translated into an uncanny double of the US nation itself.



While the opening introduces Lovewell's fight as ironic and ambivalent historical fiction, it also historicizes the setting and publication to reveal a more contested narrative than scholarship has heretofore recognized. As Hawthorne was an expert in New England history, he surely knew that Lovewell's fight not only represented the waning frontier wars, but was a direct result of the violence perpetuated in King Philip's War which occurred 50 years after the first pilgrims' winter (Kayworth and Potvin 11).<sup>87</sup> Lovewell's fight represented "the high point in American literary tradition of lying for the right," and Hawthorne's story offers incisive critiques of such deception, insinuating Lovewell was not the lauded victorious leader as he had come to be known in the national celebrations of Hawthorne's day (108).<sup>88</sup> Hawthorne's story refutes these glorifications by means of ambivalence, placing "Lovewell's Fight" in quotation marks in the opening passage as if the name itself is a product of fictitious creation, one that erases the Battle of Pequawket.<sup>89</sup> By situating the story in history, then hinting that the history is itself story, the opening passage retains an ambivalent relationship to broad nationalist brushstrokes that romantically paint Lovewell's Fight, the centennial celebrations, and the territorial conflicts contemporary with the story.

In contrast to the elusive language ironized in the opening passage and crucial to romantic national celebrations of the Lovewell Centennial—romanticizations which no

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<sup>87</sup> David Lovejoy's "Lovewell's Fight and Hawthorne's 'Roger Malvin's Burial'" details the historical sources Hawthorne used for the story.

<sup>88</sup> Colacurio writes that the "sovereign states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine all carefully planned and carried out, in 1825, a lively and visible celebration of the 'centennial' of Lovell's Fight" and many writers at the time were responding to the battle's "honored place in the newly (but rapidly) forming national mythology" (116).

<sup>89</sup> It also erases what Kayworth and Potvin's sustained account of the battle notes: that the Penobscot tribe was attempting to negotiate peace at that time (158).

doubt cast “certain circumstances judicially into the shade”—the political context in which Hawthorne is writing is one marked by definite and significant legal changes that carried weighty implications for American national identity. Not only did the period of 1794 to 1833 mark the era where most native lands were ceded to Massachusetts, those land cessations culminated in the last two cases of the Marshall Trilogy in 1831 and 1832. As mentioned earlier, the Marshall Trilogy declared native peoples “domestic dependents,” which initiated the extension of US plenary power over native communities. In anticipation, the Cherokee established their own constitution in 1827, right before Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act further devastated Indian populations and removed them farther from their homelands in 1830. The era of Hawthorne’s short story is one marked by legal questions regarding constitutional rights and private property. Connecting the story to its political moment, some scholars argue that the short story epitomizes how “Hawthorne discursively removed Indians from ‘history’ in much the same way that Andrew Jackson physically removed Indians from the land” (Powell 38). However, the story suggests a more nuanced—and haunting—allegory for the legal and literary mechanics of US settler sovereignty. Once the historical preface is itself historicized, the story’s ambivalence contests uncomplicated nationalist celebrations of Lovewell’s Fight as well as the language of uncontested title undergirding legal theft of Indian land and rights. As an allegory of the gothic nature of US settler sovereignty expressed in celebrations that masquerade as history, the story clarifies that the fate of the nation is a fate tied to the very land under contention.

The slippage between history and fiction infuses the story’s frame with uncanniness, a defamiliarization that the overtly fictional portion of the story builds on to

further interrogate the inherited plots—and genres— associated with settler sovereignty. Just as the frame draws on frontier tales to shape its gothic historical frame, the narrative that follows is similarly ghosted. The story is Hawthorne’s lone frontier tale, invoking a genre that leans heavily on romantic ideals of territorial conquest and the for-profit “Indian stories” which Hawthorne viewed with suspicion (McIntosh 189).<sup>90</sup> Yet, perhaps because Hawthorne was reticent to use such tropes, the story goes beyond the western frontier tales that Cheyfitz reminds us are an integral part of the creation of US history (“Savage Law”). The story troubles the frontier tale tradition by also relying heavily on the American jeremiad—a narrative mode described by Sacvan Bercovitch in *American Jeremiad* as the first literary genre of America, a genre of social cohesion and spiritual renewal that turns past destruction due to evil into present or future promise of new and better community. Hawthorne’s story ironically contrasts a frontier romanticism that profits from Indian exploitation with the Promised land associated with the Puritan justification of the New World by drawing on a sermon form borrowing from the book of Jeremiah. As Bercovitch notes, Hawthorne was “too much of an ironist to adopt outright the Puritan mode of ambiguity, too good a historian wholly to espouse American teleology” (205). Coupling the jeremiad tradition to the frontier frame, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” imbues two genres essential to settler sovereignty’s American national identity with the gothic doubleness of a “history” frayed by ironic undercuts.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Also see Greg Stone’s account in “The Ideal Identity: Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Loss of Native American Culture.”

<sup>91</sup> While Colacurcio calls the story a “secular jeremiad,” part of the story’s national allegory importantly rests in its allusions to religious law and divine right. Its reference to puritan religious tradition and the religious dogma informing claims of manifest destiny clearly show “Roger Malvin’s Burial” drawing on the religious iteration of the form.

The individualism of the frontier-tale-like historical preface is in marked contrast with the communal repentance associated with the jeremiad tradition, a tension between individual and community that parallels the uncanny doubleness of history looming over the entire short story. In this, the story epitomizes Hawthorne's "proclivity to rewrite New England history" as the story takes "a subversive approach to New England pieties and treats ironically the attempts of nineteenth century New Englanders to gloss over the cruelty of the Puritan community" (McIntosh 191). Hawthorne's knowledge of New England history informed not only his short story but also the literary traditions and friendships he drew from even though the history of the story is undercut by ironic invocations of frontier narratives of "Indian wars" as well as the American jeremiad.<sup>92</sup> "Roger Malvin's Burial," imbues history with fictional plots but those inherited fictions hide the bloody histories of white settler sovereignty. Importantly, however, the story moves beyond this ambiguity to root the politics of American history in the land itself.

The first environmental markers of space in the story, the oak and the rock, function as symbols of the national uncanny: they are symbols of colonial progress and settler myth-making history but work to contest settler colonial claims of entitlement. The oak is a marker of both Reuben's vow and colonial conquest, linking broken promises to claims of divine right through an ecological symbol. First, Reuben ties his bloody

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<sup>92</sup> For Hawthorne's expert historical knowledge, see *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, especially pages 12-22. Additionally, Hawthorne's long-standing friendship with Thoreau all but ensures Hawthorne knew of Thoreau's interest in local native traditions, and his lament that accounts of such encounters as Lovewell's fight are only told from one side. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau's concluding words about Lovewell's fight echo the symbolism in Hawthorne's narrative: "There have been some nations who could do nothing but construct tombs, and these are the only traces which they have left. They are the heathen. But why these stones, so upright and emphatic, like exclamation points? [...] The rarest quality in an epitaph is truth" (135-36). Also see Stone, who explores this element of Thoreau's influence and notes the 1818 visit of Penobscot chiefs to Hawthorne's home town suggests that "Hawthorne's historical imagination was impacted not only by the puritanical influences of his native Salem but also by the Native American peoples those ancestors helped to displace" (5).

handkerchief to the oak branch to aid him in finding Roger's body, and "the breeze waved the little banner upon the sapling oak and reminded Reuben of his vow" (145). As a sign of the vow, the oak also doubles as a signifier of settler nationalist history *and* Native contestations over the territory of that story. Colonially speaking, Colacurcio asserts that the oak refers to the Charter Oak of Connecticut, the oak that hid the Royal Charter of the state from English confiscation (127). Read as Charter Oak, the oak in "Roger Malvin's Burial" represents the "cardinal fact of Holy History" that may reveal the diseased root of the newly forming US settler nation (Colacurcio 127). The oak and its national historical symbols are made ironic when tied to blood, a bloodied handkerchief wrapped around its withered branches (Colacurcio 127). Moreover, Hawthorne's friend and interlocutor, Henry David Thoreau, saw oaks as a principle figure in disputing the myth of divine interpretation or will, as he writes in the "Succession of Forest Trees" (Witford). Perhaps in the same vein as Thoreauvian oaks, the oak in "Roger Malvin's Burial" calling the divinity of imperialism into question through what Alfred Crosby calls "ecological imperialism," flagging imperialism's supposed divinity as surviving through (withering) claims to naturalness.<sup>93</sup> The oak in Hawthorne's story signifies (un)burial grounds of colonial conquest, its deceitful vows and erroneous claims to naturalness.

The frequent appearance of the oak is a constant contested marker of colonization and the nation's—via Reuben's—haunted landscapes. The oak is introduced as a colonizer, as the species "that had supplied the place of the pines, which were the usual growth of

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<sup>93</sup> Alfred Crosby's work in *Ecological Imperialism* explores how important biological conquest was to formation of the New World.

the land” (140).<sup>94</sup> What is more, the oak is referred to in this exact language only twice in the story—once at the beginning, as noted, and once right before Reuben kills his son—linking the colonizing oak not just to the hopeful progress of colonial future through the oak sapling, but to the lifeless branch and “withering leaves” that greet Reuben directly after he fires his deadly shot into the forest. The oak, as symbol of colonization that progresses from hopeful sapling to “withered, sapless, and utterly dead” branch tracks not just the psychological state of Reuben, but the decay of a nation built on land theft and duplicitous historical and legal claims. As a sign of his vow, the oak sapling tied with blood becomes a dead branch who leaves wither because of the corrosive guilt in the colonial project. The prominence of “withered leaves” testifies to the Jeremiad-like failure to observe the “law of the Lord,” as Thompson’s sustained study of Biblical allusion in the story notes (94).<sup>95</sup> In this, the oak registers contested histories and laws used to justify the consequences of conquest. The nationalist icon in irony discloses the story of an “ordained” colonial project bound to death, murder, and deceit.

The colonial politics of the oak are further complicated by contested politics of its symbolism. Kayworth and Potvin observe that “The Oak” was the transcription of the name of Chief Paugus, the celebrated Native chief who was killed by Lovewell and whose grave was dug up by later colonialists attempting to identify bodies (178). Additionally, Samuels reminds readers that bending oak saplings was a common way for Native American tribes in the area to mark trails (26). The oak, tethered as it is to territorial contestations and its ecological history, shows what Bergland deems the “national uncanny” of US settler sovereignty has profound, indeed inextricable, relevance

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<sup>94</sup> Crosby *Ecological Imperialism* is narrated nicely here in Hawthorne’s story.

<sup>95</sup> Erlich finds Psalm 1:3 similarly relevant to Hawthorne’s story (382).

for the American environmental imagination. Bergland traces a national uncanny in Hawthorne and others but does not analyze the ways the oak marks a haunting associated with Reuben's settler status nor the implications for an American environmental tradition that critiques the system of settler colonial conquest – narrative and material.<sup>96</sup> As a symbol, then, the oak both alludes to nationalist colonial history as well as invokes Native contestations over the territory of that history. It manifests as a haunting reminder of the uncanny *nature* associated with US settler sovereignty.

The oak's symbolism is profoundly weighted with the geological feature that appears with it, the rock. Together, the oak and the rock operate as uncanny environmental signifiers for the haunting history of settler sovereignty. The rock functions as a monument of death in the place where Roger Malvin's bones rest. Similar to the oak, the rock is uncannily described with the exact same words at the story's beginning and right before Reuben fires into the thicket killing his son. What is more, the rock is depicted through the mirroring rhetoric of double negative, as "not unlike a gigantic grave-stone." It is only at the very end, when Reuben finds his son's dead body next to the dry bones of Roger Malvin, that he declares "This broad rock *is* the gravestone," marking the finality of shift from metaphor to material that the story traces more broadly (286, *emphasis mine*).

The rock functions as a gothic historical signifier beyond its doubling as a gravestone. What Colacurcio calls the rock's "glaring historicity" is tied to Plymouth

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<sup>96</sup> Bergland's *National Uncanny* reads US national guilt in the uncanny specter of the Indian. Through Bergland nods to the national uncanny at work in "Roger Malvin's Burial," he, like McIntosh and Erlich, reads the oak and the frontier landscape as psychological allegory. No scholar thus far has linked the allegory to the politics of the contested histories imbued in the oak itself, despite the fact that if the oak is a psychological symbol that carries competing national political allusions in its symbolism, it is safe to assume that the psychological allegory is meant to map onto a national one.

Rock (which had been broken apart in “the patriotic process” of moving it to the town square), Lovell’s Rock (an inscribed memorial to the battle), and the Ten Commandments (Colacurcio 124-25). Ultimately, Colacurcio claims the biblical inscription on Roger Malvin’s burial rock is “‘Thou shalt not kill’ – serving Reuben a subliminal reminder that his *original* forest-expedition was far from innocent” (125).<sup>97</sup> As Colacurcio notes here, the rock is a signifier of a narrative of national covenant that promises settler possession of land through violent, “far from innocent” Indian removal. Indeed, the rock in the story seems to follow Mogen, Sanders, and Kapinsky’s definition of Gothicism, as a symbol that allows readers to become “aware of breaks in the logocentric history, of gaps in the authorized text of the past the inscriptions of another history break through into meaning (16). For these scholars and others, Gothicism results from “*a particular rift* in history” that “develops and widens into a *dark chasm* that separates now from what has been” (ibid. 16). The rock’s gothicism announces the history of Indian removal and Indigenous genocide as it gushes out of the historical landscapes and icons of settler sovereignty.

Indeed, the conclusion of the story links the history of the oak and the rock to a lineage of broken vows buried in the sinister nature of frontier expansion:

the withered topmost bough of the oak loosened itself, in the stilly air, and fell in soft, light fragments upon the rock, upon the leaves, upon Reuben, upon his wife and child, and upon Roger Malvin's bones: Then Reuben's heart was stricken, and the tears gushed out like water from a rock. The vow that the wounded youth had made, the blighted man had come to redeem.

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<sup>97</sup> Colacurcio footnotes the scholarship that has traced biblical references and argues that “it seems scarcely an overstatement to suggest Hawthorne seems to have had the whole of the Old Testament in mind – at least insofar as that complex work can be read as a unified epic of religious tribalism; and, significantly, as it had been willfully applied to the ragged matter of Land, the Indians, and the Generations in the pseudo-typic externalities of provincial New England” (560).



Like the bloody handkerchief that marks the burial site, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” ties the conquest of the frontier to the historical tension indexed in burial practices, suggesting that a “failure to perform the duties over the dead could prove disastrous to future generations” (Laderman 68). In this link, many scholars have noted, “the rock and the oak tell virtually the whole story of the National Covenant” (Colacurcio 124). In his study of the story in *Sacred Remains*, Gary Laderman notes that for “prosperity in the settlements, and success in the movement West, the dead—especially those who died in the fight to control the frontier—must be buried appropriately in the very land under contention” (68). The narrator of “Roger Malvin’s Burial” confirms Laderman’s analysis, announcing that, “An almost superstitious regard, arising perhaps from the customs of the Indians, whose war was with the dead, as well as the living, was paid by the frontier inhabitants to the rites of sepulture” (144).<sup>98</sup> Regardless of the cultural origins of the burial scene, the frontier inhabitants (if not also the narrator) clearly regard the observation of burial rites to be associated with the presence of Native peoples. In this, burial practices are not just a proxy for national identity but also signify US settler sovereignty’s historical amnesia regarding Indigenous genocide.

The oak and the rock signify a failure to observe both the history and presence of Native peoples. In contrast to what Emerson’s *Nature* dismissed as “an outcast corpse” in the section titled “Idealism,” the unburied dead haunts both the history and the present of settler land claims in Hawthorne’s story (235). The oak and the rock perform parallel

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<sup>98</sup> Paul Juhasz reads these frontier burial rites as drawn from Native traditions. Juhasz claims that Roger Malvin’s burial in seated posture between the oak and rock is in accordance with what is said to have been local Native burial practices to keep the corpse in an upright position, though non-Native source material is used to corroborate that claim (51). Juhasz’s “The House of Atreus on the American Frontier: ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial’ and the Search for an American Mythos” argues that while historians have located Hawthorne’s source material primarily in the writings of J.B.H. Roger Malvin’s burial position more closely resembles what Phillip Freneau’s 1787 poem “The Indian Burying Ground” identified as the “sitting upright” Indian burial position (51).

functions, cleaving the icons of colonial progress with a warning of the murderous legacies hidden in the colonial commandments and settler sovereignty's stories of redemption through murder. The oak and rock marshal historical allusion to invest settler claims of righteously and naturally justified land title with a gothic satire.

In keeping with the Jeremiadic tradition, the story ends claiming Reuben's sins "expiated." However, by the end of the story the rock cries out against such settler claims to innocence.<sup>99</sup> Just as Reuben is thinking that he may "find the bones, so long unburied; and that, having laid earth over them, peace would throw sunlight into the sepulcher of his heart," the story makes clear no such easy expiation is possible. Though the story ends declaring "His sin was expiated, the curse was gone from him," the story does not offer any comfort. Instead, it sheds "leaves, upon Reuben, upon his wife and child, and upon Roger Malvin's bones," marking them all with the decaying aftermath of conquest.

The cost of conquest is emphasized in the last analogy in the story, where, finally, "Reuben's heart was stricken, and the tears gushed out like water from a rock" (286). This "water from a rock" is most commonly cited as an allusion to Isaiah 48, Numbers 20 and Exodus 17, in order to argue for the rock's significance as a testament to God's protection and providence and the necessary sacrifice inherent in National Covenant narratives (performed by Reuben Bourne).<sup>100</sup> However, it is important to note that the

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<sup>99</sup> See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor."

<sup>100</sup> Isaiah 48:21: "And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out." Numbers 20:11: "And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." Exodus 17:6: "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."

biblical significance of the rock is as often a sign of providence as it is a sign of disobedience to divine law. All versions of the water-from-rock symbol are tied directly to the future of the nation of Israel who placed their hope in Jacob (in Isaiah) and Jacob's great-great-grandson Moses (in Numbers and Exodus). In this genealogy, critics fail to take Psalm 105: 41-45 into consideration, a passage that clearly links the acquisition of "the lands of the nations" to the inherited "labor of the people *that they might keep his statutes and keep his laws*" (*emphasis mine*).<sup>101</sup> When considering biblical sources, it is significant that the Psalm passage involves Abraham, the first patriarch of Judaism and, thus, the original "father" of Jacob, Moses, and Cyrus, the "new Moses." The water from the rock trope that ends Hawthorne's story certainly alludes to the biblical image, suggesting not just the future of a nation built on sacrifice, but a genealogy of conquest and responsibility to law imbued in the trope itself. The story refigures the Jeremiadic tradition through the icons and biblical narratives associated with U.S. colonial conquest.

The gothic uncanniness of the story is deepened through character names and dates, as the story develops from the shadowy ambivalence in the opening passage toward a specific indictment of US settler colonialism. Just as Reuben Bourne performs an allegorical guilt-consciousness in the story, his son Cyrus symbolizes the hope and prophetic warning for a national future. Cyrus is introduced as a figure of the future of the nation: "the father of a race, the patriarch of a people, the founder of a mighty nation

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<sup>101</sup> Psalm 105: 41-45: "He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed like a river in the desert. 42 For he remembered his holy promise and Abraham his servant. 43 And he brought forth his people with joy and his chosen with gladness; 44 and gave them the lands of the nations, and they inherited the labor of the people 45 that they might observe his statutes and keep his laws. Praise ye the Lord."

yet to be” (150).<sup>102</sup> Yet, Cyrus is killed for the sacrifice implicit to the colonial progress the story tracks. As further irony, the biblical Cyrus was not just a figure of empire, but also a model of a different type of conquest. Historically, Cyrus is known for his Edict of Restoration that allowed the displaced people of Israel to return to their homelands, for observing the customs of the areas he conquered, and for drafting the first Western human rights document on the Cyrus Cylinder. In this history, Cyrus cannot but figure as a contrast to the settler colonialism of the preface’s setting. Further, at its end, Roger Malvin and Cyrus Bourne both die near May 12<sup>th</sup>, the day before the founding of Jamestown in 1657, as well as three days prior to the start of the French and Indian War. As Colacurcio notes, the year of Cyrus’s death in the story is the year that Indian warfare began again (126). These dates allude to a colonial history that culminates in the death of “pilgrims,” Roger Malvin and Cyrus, in their seemingly pre-ordained cemetery. The story’s genealogical threads ironically tie the violence of colonial history to national narrative’s selective and ahistorical memory.

Contrary to claims that “Roger Malvin’s Burial” is a type of nationalist “neo-colonization,” the story itself is laden with uncanny ambivalence—from historical narratives, celebrations, icons, narrative genres, and the same heroic dates and names—that implies contested histories, if not outright disavowal of the particular history associated with teleology of colonial progress. In its uncanny inversions of colonial “natures,” narrative modes, and historical names, dates, and national mythology, the story’s gothic account complicates US settler sovereignty’s (hi)stories of free land and unobstructed title. The land and environmental markers associated with the frontier

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<sup>102</sup> Most critics who treat the biblical source material agree with W.R. Thompson’s claim that “Cyrus Bourne resembles the Biblical Cyrus in his promise of future leadership as well as in the service he performs as an agent of another’s redemption” (95).

testify to the ways that settler sovereignty's claims to property, "uncontested title and inalienable right" are haunted (Benn Michaels 95). Indeed, through its uncanny historiography, the story "turns gothic claustrophobia into kleptophobia" revealing the inherited plots of settler sovereignty to be haunted by the gothic bones (unburied) in its national project of land theft (Luck 215). In this, "Roger Malvin's Burial" offers a version of the American Gothic that carries a more critical uncanny mode to root the American environmental literary tradition.

The national uncanny in "Roger Malvin's Burial" offers a subtle, unsettling critique of the property logics of Hawthorne's moment. Yet, though the story refuses exoneration of the hero, the story ultimately does not look beyond the nascent Anglo-American imperialism defining its horizon. The story possesses a "beautiful ambiguity" that expresses Native disappearance in aesthetic terms, what many like Renee Bergland have seen as a "necessary part of [Hawthorne's] literary nationalism" (Bergland 147). The story and its landscape are haunted by, but do nothing to challenge, the spectralization of Native dispossession that Jodi Byrd reminds readers is at the core of US settler sovereignty: "Indians are typically spectral, implied and felt, but remain as lamentable casualties of national progress who haunt the United States on the cusp of empire and are destined to disappear with the frontier itself" (Byrd xx). Here, Byrd could have been just as easily summarizing "Roger Malvin's Burial" as US Empire. The story offers an allegory of the uncanniness of settler colonialism, an uncanniness that Cheyfitz reminds us began in 1823 when US settler sovereignty assumed ultimate title to Native lands by translating sovereign Indian communities into the uncanny phrase of domestic dependency. Byrd and Cheyfitz note that translation placed Native peoples in the political

space *between* the domestic and the foreign (Cheyfitz xiii). This uncanny phantasmal phrasal space ensures what Judith Butler reminds us, “The derealization of the ‘Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (33). In the U.S. context, Indigenous peoples are always a remainder, an excess, an Other and the uncanny double of the US nation itself. “Roger Malvin’s Burial” expresses this national uncanny in more overt terms than *Nature*, but still fails to fully engage the realities of Native peoples in the U.S., especially given those near and dear to Hawthorne’s time and place.

### **Apess’s “Eulogy on King Phillip” and the Plots of White Terror**

Hawthorne, a descendent of Puritan leaders, was almost certainly familiar with his geographical proximate, Pequot William Apess, a Methodist minister, well known orator, and what we might today consider a social justice activist. In *National Uncanny*, Bergland explains how the comparison illuminates an important erasure in Hawthorne’s work: “When we consider the fact that the well known Pequot walked the streets of Salem alongside Hawthorne himself, Hawthorne’s assertions of Indian disappearance begin to look very much like deliberate sleight of hand” (112). Bergland’s comparative analysis, though not extended to “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” provokes a deeper analysis of the uncanny that Bergland diagnoses especially in relation to the environmental and political implications of the American gothic tradition. Where *Nature*’s settler common sense buries the “dry bones of the past,” “Roger Malvin’s Burial” regards the burial of the past as an ongoing, uncanny, and haunted process.<sup>103</sup> Though the “Eulogy” is a profoundly palimpsestic example of the national uncanny that Bergland uncovers, Bergland does not examine the national uncanny as it testifies to a continuous history of

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<sup>103</sup> “Settler common sense” is Mark Rifkin’s term for the ways settler colonialism structures everyday epistemologies, modalities of being and sense making.

Indigenous resistance and the importance of that history in the present. In crucial contrast, Apess' "Eulogy on King Philip" exhumes the haunted stories of settler sovereignty and "refuses to stay buried" (Wolfe 6). Ultimately, Apess's "Eulogy" uses these gothic tropes to suggest a constitutive, ghostly link between whiteness, property, slavery, genocide, and settler sovereignty—a link vital to racial and environmental justice.

While "Roger Malvin's Burial" exemplifies the historiographic potential of the gothic genre, Apess' famous last public statement realizes it through an unflinching decolonial historiography that confronts the gothic present in US settler history. In his opening to "A Eulogy on King Philip," Apess claimed descendancy from King Philip, the seventeenth-century Wampanoag leader known as Metacom (or Metacomet), the primary figure in King Philip's war. This conflict is often considered formative in the settlement of New England and the clash that led to Lovewell's fight, the historical setting that framed "Roger Malvin's Burial." Rather than the implied—but disjointed, broken—connection between frontier history and the action of Hawthorne's short story, Apess offers himself as the living history of the peoples and places that only ghost Hawthorne's fictional, Indian-less setting. The lineage testifies to the living, persistent presence of Indigenous resistance as what Eve Tuck and C. Ree call a "future-ghost," a "becoming-specter, haunting and haunted" (643). Tuck and Ree draw on Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, all of whom would find Apess engaging in a decolonial gothic mode—a mode of recognition that a "ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*" (64, *emphasis original*). Indeed, Apess' "Eulogy" is a ghostly "kind of exhuming of the grave

that has been prepared for Philip and, by extension, for all Indian peoples” (Wolfe 6). Except that Apess explicitly raises the historical retellings of his time to frame the ways these hauntings persist in the terrors of white violence and its insatiable, all consuming hunger for stolen property at the same time as his very presence attests to the unreality of Indian ghost by way of the reality of Indian bodies.<sup>104</sup>

Apess uses tropes of the Gothic literary genre to highlight the haunted nonfictional histories hidden in US settler sovereignty’s inheritances, especially its claims to land. It looks beyond Hawthorne’s obsessive ambivalence to demystify the intersecting, and thus intersectional, roots of white terror. Performing for an audience of Bostonian liberals who ostensibly condemn the south for slavery but did not seem as concerned with Cherokee removal or the plight of their Mashpee neighbors, Apess testified to the continuing concerns of Native peoples and the falsehood of narratives of Native extinction (Brooks 198). His “Eulogy on King Philip”—in speech and print—formalizes the uncanny testimonial his presence proved in person. Julia Emberley uses the term “testimonial uncanny” for Indigenous storytelling practices that illuminate and heal the trauma of settler colonial violences. Though Emberley does not turn to nineteenth century figures nor analyze the concept in regards to nonfiction, Apess’

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<sup>104</sup> Apess’ “Eulogy” is a classic heteroglossic text. Beyond the immense amount of quotation in the eulogy itself, Jill Lepore shows Apess responding to the popular play *Metamora*. Cheryl Walker notes that Apess engaged the work of “Washington Irving (*Sketch Book*), James Eastburn and Rober C. Sands (*Yamoyden*), and John Augustus Stone (*Metamora*) [who] also returned to the story of King Philip’s War to reinterpret that conflict and connect it with the new nation” (167). Maureen Konkle sees Apess was responding to Massachusetts Congressmen Edward Everett’s “own rhetorical version of King Philip’s War given some months previously, in which his elaborate sympathy for Indians only served to justify political oppression” and drawing on Samuel Gardner Drake’s history of North American Indians and Elias Boudinot’s *A Star of the West* which was itself a compilation of questionable historical sources (99, 136, 111). Moreover, Apess could also be said to be responding to Emerson’s September 12, 1835 address to the town of Concord in which Emerson begins by celebrating the lives of great men, including the tragic end of Philip that Emerson uses to naturalize Indian disappearance: “We know beforehand who must conquer in that unequal struggle. The red man may destroy here and there a straggler, as a wild beast may; he may fire a farmhouse, or a village; but the association of the white men and their arts of war give them an overwhelming advantage” (“Historical Discourse”).



“Eulogy” offers an early example of the ways a testimonial uncanny can vitally refigure the cornerstones of settler sovereignty, unhousing and deterritorialize the means by which narratives become history.

To observe the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Philip’s death, Apess delivered the “Eulogy” two times and published it the same year, all uncanny testimonials that unsettle the stories of settler sovereignty. Apess first gave the eulogy on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1836, on the widely celebrated anniversary of Andrew Jackson’s 1815 defeat of the British in the Battle of New Orleans, “a victory that made Jackson’s political career and secured U.S. claims to western territory; it was a date forever associated with Jackson” (Konkle 126). Speaking on that particular day, Apess challenged the narrative of inevitable Indian extinction underwriting the paternalism of Jacksonian removal. Apess then returned to the stage to deliver a slightly altered version of his speech. In both, Apess presents a profound challenge to the settler narrative tradition that uses the “figure of the eloquent orator” to rationalize histories of “force and fraud” (Cheyfitz, *Poetics*, xii). Instead, Apess as orator uncovers the uncanny national deceit at the core of obsessions around property, possession, and inheritance. Apess’ presence and speeches defy descriptions of disappearance. His text further testifies to a haunting refusal to be buried.

The title page of the published eulogy extends Apess’ uncanny critique beyond his Boston audience, leveraging audience expectations to establish common ground but only to immediately unsettle that terrain. The title page, presenting the eulogy “By the Rev. William Apess, An Indian,” appeals to authority via settler systems associated with racial hierarchy, Christianity and “authentic” Indianness. Those terms of agreement are quickly renegotiated. The title is underwritten by a question that lays claim to the

category of “man” so crucial to both Christian and scientific categorical hierarchies: “Who shall stand in after years in this famous temple, and declare that Indians are not men? If men, then heirs to the same inheritance.” Establishing his authority via settler categories of authenticity, religious and secular, the question that follows forces the audience to acknowledge a shared claim to inheritance through either God’s kingdom of men or the Linnaean classification of *Homo sapiens*. Lisa Brooks shows Apess traces this appeal to a shared kinship in the opening, where Apess merges the Christian God and the “God of Nature,” tying nature, nativity, and divinity together (200).

Indeed, the first lines of the Eulogy further unsettle any strict repetition of settler religious or secular categories that the opening page invoked. Apess opens his eulogy, a form typically associated with praise, affirmation, and exultation, instead with refusal:

I do not arise to spread before you the fame of a noted warrior, whose natural abilities shone like those of the great and mighty Philip of Greece, or of Alexander the Great, or like those of Washington - whose virtues and patriotism are engraven on the hearts of my audience. Nor do I approve of war as being the best method of bowing to the haughty tyrant, Man, and civilizing the world. (277)

Here, his first line launches into the realm of the uncanny—defamiliarizing the eulogy form by announcing that his tribute will not follow the pattern of patriotic hero worship that the eulogy typically, and gothically, carves into human hearts. Though Apess makes sure to assert Phillip’s equivalence with such heroes, he dispels the foundation for shared humanity established in the title page’s quote by calling “man” nothing more than “a haughty tyrant” bent on a violent mode of “civilizing the world.” In this second sentence, Apess interrogates “man” as the categorical basis for common inheritance, seeding a suspicion toward claims to who is or is not a “man” that continues throughout his “Eulogy” and anticipating what many scholars like Jodi Byrd and Alexander Weheliye

have noted—that “man” is a core Enlightenment principle that underwrites dominance, discovery, and tyranny (Byrd 9, Weheliye 4). Apess reveals that “man” is a misrepresentation, a tool for justifying exploitation and remaining blind to the humanity of others (Konkle 108). In his tribute to the long deceased, the idea of “man” takes on an uncanny doubleness. From the title page to the opening two sentences, Apess roots the eulogy in the territories of the uncanny.

Instead of a lineage of war heroes praising abilities and the virtues of patriotism, Apess offers a history of inheritance that troubles the “natural” foundations of settler sovereignty. He announces that, “purer virtues remain untold,” focusing his eulogy in the spaces where “Roger Malvin’s Burial” instead “cast certain circumstances judicially into the shade” (Apess 277, Hawthorne 139). Indeed, where “Roger Malvin’s Burial” linked nature to possessive settler sovereignty, Apess defamiliarizes familiar tales of “natural abilities” by praising “beings made by the God of Nature . . . whose brilliant talents shone in the display of natural things” (277). Using the language of the “natural,” Apess asserts another history forgotten in “enlightened” narratives of settler sovereignty and civilization. He separates “enlightened and cultivated men” from “the pure laws of nature” (278). In its place, he appeals “to the lovers of liberty” to remember that,

those few remaining descendants who now remain as the monument of the cruelty of those who came to improve our race and correct our errors - and as the immortal Washington lives endeared and engraven on the hearts of every white in America, never to be forgotten in time - even such is the immortal Philip honored, as held in memory by the degraded but yet grateful descendants” (277).

Apess’ use of the language of “natural rights” and descendency reminds the audience that his presence, and theirs, testifies to the uncanny inheritance engraved into the hearts of (white) America, unsettling the rhetoric of the rights of man undergirding settler

sovereignty. He furthers the uncanny effect that Native presence has on settler sovereignty by continuing his appeal through the language of liberal American individualism, sure to resonate with his public audience, calling on “every patriot, especially in the enlightened age” to acknowledge a Native precedent “as glorious as the *American Revolution*” that fought for American popular sovereignty (277). Apess’ rhetorical appeals place Native sovereignty concurrent with but outside of the pales of settler colonialism, reflecting the unassimilable Other, the haunting remainder, the uncanny double both inside and outside of US settler sovereignty.

Apess repurposes claims of heroic male descendency so embedded in US national narrative in order to contest the gothic present of colonial progress. First, as Jean O’Brien notes, Apess “used a form, the eulogy, and a narrative, that of King Philip’s War, that even in the early nineteenth century were venerable means for U.S. Intellectuals to tell the story of the nation’s noble origins” (133). However, instead of starting with a tribute to King Philip, Apess begins with a lineage of Western colonial figures: “noted warriors” Philip of Greece who subjugated most of Greece through warfare, his son Alexander the great who led unprecedented military campaigns seeking colonial conquest, and, implying succession, George Washington (277). After invoking this colonial lineage,

Apess describes the gothic realities of colonization, derisively alluding to the three men,

who are said to be honorable warriors, who, in the wisdom of their civilized legislation, think it no crime to wreak their vengeance upon whole nations and communities, until fields are covered with blood and the rivers turn into purple fountains, while groans, like distant thunder, are heard from the wounded and the tens of thousands of the dying, leaving helpless families depending on their cares and sympathies for life; while a loud response is heard floating through the air from the ten thousand Indian children and orphans, who are left to mourn the honorable acts of the few — civilized men. (278)

Apess' language invokes biblical vengeance and end-days prophecies as fields and rivers of blood provide the gothic setting for the haunted line of male descent from Philip of Greece to Washington. Groaning, wounded, dying cries float through the air, while *fatherless* children and orphans mourn the "honorable acts of the few – civilized men." Here, the eulogy links battle victories and patriotic heroes to the logic of conquest that underwrites the paternalism labeling Native peoples domestic dependents. While the supposed heroes "think it no crime to wreak their vengeance," Apess' ironic paternalism eulogizes this blood-soaked history as a history, also, of the present.

The gothic language of haunted inheritances implicates Apess' audience as he aims to "melt the prejudice that exists in the hearts of those who are in possession of his soil, and only by right of conquest" (277). This sentence connects his audience to the unqualified heroics of those figures he traces through the same supposedly "natural" right of conquest. Throughout the eulogy, Apess uses the language of paternalism and inheritance to connect the present to the past, and the national to the local and personal. First, Apess' claim to be a descendent of King Philip was added between the first and second editions, a fact that testifies to Apess' conscious manipulation of inheritance claims as perhaps responding to the politics of his current moment (Velikova 326).<sup>105</sup> Moreover, Apess mistakenly claims King Phillip as Pequot instead of Wampanoag, a re-historicizing resonant with his leveraged lineage (Konkle 114). In both errors, Apess refigures the logic of paternalism to position King Philip's War as a clear precursor to the

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<sup>105</sup> Roumianan tells us that Apess's misattribution is important. King Philip belonged to the Wampanoag tribe, and the Pequot and the Wampanoag were the two tribes involved in largest wars between Indians and colonists in 17th century Pequot War from 1637-38 and King Philip's War from 1675-76. In the latter, the Pequots sided with the English against the Wampanoags. The enmity between these two tribes was well documented. Thus, Roumianan notes, Apess claims his ancestor as chief of a tribe inimical to his own, a fact that could be said to testify to a tactic of allyship that characterizes much of Apess' other writings and activism.

Mashpee conflict where the state responded to the Mashpee statement of Native sovereignty by immediately characterizing the Mashpee as in “open rebellion” to the “parental feelings” of the state (Konkle 121). Thus, when Apess describes the groans, moans, wounds, and deaths of the fatherless, he refigures the language of paternalism and inheritance to question the canonical lineage of settler-sovereign heroics. Those horrors belong to the failures of the parents, their present and inherited lack of feeling.

Apess’ gothic tropes rehistoricize white terror as the spectacular violence underwriting US settler sovereignty. Just as scholars like Audra Simpson, Lisa Brooks, Barry O’Connell, Cheryl Walker, and Robert Warrior see Apess providing not a counter history but a re-historicizing, Apess uses settler history to lay bare its gothic, terrifying “deeds and depredations committed by whites upon Indians before the civilized world, and then they can judge for themselves” (279). Indeed, the “barbarous deeds of death” at the core of settler sovereignty are epitomized in Apess’ rehistoricizing of King Philip’s death (298). After detailing King Philip’s many generousities and virtues, the perverse Gothicism of white terror displayed by chopping Philip’s body into pieces is ever the more chilling. Settlers cut “off first his arms and then his head,” “After which his head was sent to Plymouth and exposed upon a gibbet for twenty years; and his hand to Boston, where it was exhibited in savage triumph; and his mangled body denied a resting place in the tomb” (297, 302). The grisly details of Philip’s death become symptomatic, even emblematic, of the sovereign power that Michel Foucault would come to describe in the drawn-and-quartered regicide that opens *Discipline and Punish*, a power that Elizabeth Povinelli writes is “enacted over tortured, disemboweled, charred, and hacked bodies of humans” (1). A full 150 years before these noted thinkers, Apess explicitly

connects the gruesomeness of settler sovereignty to an ongoing history of white terror, rehistoricizing not just King Phillip or Apess' moment but our own.

Rather than present his history in chronological order, Apess organizes events through contrast, effectively replacing a progressive teleology, with the uncannily repetitive consistency of white terror. Apess opposes the “inhuman act of the whites” to “Indians [who] were so tender to them as to their own children” (279). He begins in 1614, when whites enslave Native peoples, then goes back further, to 1611, to quote a settler document that chronicles Indians refusing to “traffick in Indians' blood and bones” (280). In quick succession, Apess jumps to a 1620 settler invasion where Pilgrims “possessed themselves of a portion of the country, and built themselves houses” (280). Apess then reminds his audience of the uncanny nature of this act of settlement: “This, if now done, it would be called an insult and every white man would be called out to go and act the part of a patriot... and if every intruder butchered, it would be sung upon every hilltop” (280). Apess draws out the hypocrisy, brutality, and inextricability of whiteness and US settler nationalism.

Apess goes on to show that settler possession leads to the starving, servitude, and death of his people. If not gothic enough, Apess hauntingly recounts Captain Standish's famous ambushes, which “The white people call this stabbing, feasting the savages,” including settlers 1632 grave robbing of supposed friends and the 1619 murder of Native peoples without provocation (281, 283). Apess rounds out his haunted historical tour with the by-now eerily familiar specter of Native hospitality when, in 1630, Pilgrims were welcomed in and saved by a “benevolent chief” only to, a year later, pass laws that charged Native people for entering Pilgrim houses (285). If the uncanny describes

feelings of being unhoused or deterritorialized, where the familiar becomes strange under the emergent threat of the hidden, settler sovereignty is quite literally an uncanny form of social relations—haunted by what its houses are built upon.

The presence of Native peoples reminds US settler sovereignty of its own fragility, brutality, and eerily literal cannibalism. What Apess calls the “guilty conscience” of the white American settler colonial project is, even by their own accounts, haunted. Quoting Pilgrims in 1647, Apess reminds readers that despite the brutality of Native genocide, “large, respectable tribes” testify to the continuation of Native presence (285). In this, Apess uses US settler history to testify to its own failure, refiguring settler history into a haunting historiography of “Rum and powder and ball, together with all the diseases,” of “destruction upon innocent families and helpless children” where “living babies were found at the breast of their dead mothers” (286).

Apess’ account offers a gothic reproductive and metaphoric ancestor of what Jodi Byrd calls “zombie imperialism.” A dead mother’s milk still feeding a living child epitomizes Byrd’s formulation where in order to make liberal democratic colonialism live, “it must consume, feast, cannibalize the lands and bodies of people of color” (Byrd 228). Apess details the relation that Byrd describes: “Notwithstanding all the bitter feelings the whites have generally shown toward the Indians, yet they have been the only instrument in preserving their lives” (285). Though speaking of Native hospitality here, Apess makes it clear that White survival depends on Native instrumentalization and death. A ghostly question floats between Apess’ lines, asking where we could find more gothic imagery than in settler history. In Apess’ historiography, white settlement’s own historical record tells a sinister horror story of haunted and insatiable grave-robbing



cannibals uncannily familiar to his audience as settler sovereignty. What's more, Apess links this historiography to icons of colonial progress, exhuming the uncanny white terror buried in monuments like Plymouth Rock, genres like the Jeremiad, and U.S. legal codes.

Apess digs up the constitutive, continuous, and contemporary violence buried by the symbolism of settler colonialist nostalgia like Plymouth Rock. Apess anticipates Renato Rosaldo's concept of "imperialist nostalgia," a form of lamentation that refuses to acknowledge complicity as it laments the passing of something for which the lamenter is responsible for exterminating. Indeed, Apess uses the eulogy, a genre inherently associated with nostalgia, to charge settler colonialism, or proto-imperialism, with a monumental lack of remorse. Jean O'Brien investigates this erasure through the pattern of firstling, lasting, and replacing where monuments displace Native peoples by declaring the settlers as "first" at the same time Indigenous peoples are lamented as the "last" of their "race." Apess exposes the literal cornerstone of settler nostalgic erasure, following his zombie-like metaphor to enjoin his audience to:

let the day be dark, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of December 1622; let it be forgotten in your celebration, in your speeches, and by the burying of the rock that your fathers first put their foot upon. . .let every man of color wrap himself in mourning, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July are days of mourning and not joy. (286)

Apess establishes a link between historical record and monuments of colonial progress like Plymouth Rock. Adam Dahl and Eric Cheyfitz both consider the ways Apess plays on Daniel Webster's story of Plymouth Rock to critique the "political, social, and ethical roots of American democracy (represented in the symbol of Plymouth Rock) in settler colonialism" (Dahl 303).<sup>106</sup> By suggesting that the place the Pilgrim "fathers first put

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<sup>106</sup> According to Dahl, "Webster retains a sense of American identity as derived from pure and progressive origins untouched by the founding violence of settler colonialism" (303).

their foot upon” should signify mourning, not joy, Apess refigures icons of settler celebration into uncanny funerals which unite peoples of color. Following a list of settler-perpetrated terrors, Apess finds “our groves and untiring grounds are gone, our dead are dug up” and asks “What, then, shall we do?” (306). He answers the question with another: “Shall we cease crying and say it is all wrong, or shall we bury the hatchet and those unjust laws and Plymouth Rock together and become friends?” (306). Though Adam Dahl notes that burying the hatchet “is a triple symbol of division, injustice, and the American founding” (302), Dahl does not attend to the words that come right before. Apess prefaces the triangulation with “to cease crying and say it is all wrong,” and thus offers a choice between decrying the wrongs of settler colonial violence or burying the mechanisms of war be they monumental, calendrical, or narrative. Thus, Apess limits audience choice to denouncing settler colonialism in one form or another. And he does it through settler history.

In this, Apess exposes settler sovereignty’s decidedly gothic and paradoxical nature. U.S. settler sovereignty’s obsession with land and denial of the past insists that the remains of violence remain in the unburied, haunted landscapes of the present. In this, the “Eulogy” preserves historical memory where “Roger Malvin’s Burial” seems to only fictionalize its deceits, a crucial difference that persists even though Apess turns to the same genre that “Roger Malvin’s Burial” relied upon: the Jeremiad.

Just as Apess uses settler history and monuments, so, too, he turns the U.S. settler state’s most formative literary mode into an uncanny mirror reflecting settler sovereignty’s paradoxes. Taking up the literary form Bercovitch cites as America’s first literary genre, the form most associated with US national identity formation and

American exceptionalism, “Apess uses the very narrative that the early English settlers constructed to convince themselves of their rightness to demonstrate how very wrong they were” (Bizell 41). Bizzell clarifies the uncanniness of Apess’ literary tactic, noting, “the damning point, from the perspective of the American Jeremiad, is that the English actions were not justified and unsuccessful” and Apess provided living testament to that uncanny fact (43). He uses the genre to interrogate the rhetoric of colonial righteousness, calling “the Puritans and their descendants to repentance for the genocide they committed against the New England Indians” (Cheyfitz 84). In what he calls Apess’ “palimpsest of history,” Eric Cheyfitz deems Apess’ eulogy an anti-Jeremiad Jeremiad, a text “not simply opposed to the jeremiad but ... in a dialectical relationship with it” whose purpose is a retelling of American history “to make visible the palimpsestic erasures that the exceptionalist narrative enacts” (*The Disinformation Age* 84, 89). Cheyfitz’s term for the text follows the uncanniness of the text itself—drawing attention to the ways Apess’ jeremiad undergoes a mirror-like distortion where the familiar is dizzyingly doubled.

Apess wields a literary genre linked with origin but shows it to be more aptly associated with power – the endings, termination, death wrought by settler sovereignty. The jeremiad is, in the words of Eric Cheyfitz, “the rhetorical strategy [used] to justify Native genocide specifically and white supremacy in general” (Cheyfitz 84). Cheyfitz’ work on Apess’ anti-jeremiad jeremiad highlights the literary (and uncanny) dimension to Apess unsettling and deterritorializing project which uses settler sovereignty’s own genocidal narrative tools. With the genre most associated with American divinity – the Puritan, Calvinist, jeremiad – Apess interrogates what Wendy Brown reminds us is the “persistent theological dimension of sovereignty” (61). In her work on the paradoxes of

(Western) sovereignty, Brown exhumes its religious dimensions from its first theoreticians such as Carl Schmidt. As if intentionally satirizing the supposed godliness that Brown so recently traced, Apess shows “prayers, preaching, and examples of those pretended pious” were “the foundation for all the slavery and degradation in the American colonies toward colored people,” a sentiment famously repeated in the Appendix to Frederick Douglas’ first autobiography (304). Apess insists that though “this language is sickening,” it is important to hear because this “language was made use of” (Apess 304). Apess follows the jeremiad’s arc, cautioning of catastrophe caused by broken covenant, while also highlighting the genre’s ties to the paradoxes of sovereignty. In that critique, Apess eulogizes what Lucy Maddox and Lisa Brooks both remind contemporary readers was the tragic hero in the new American canon at the time of Apess’ eulogy: King Philip. Apess places King Phillip in an arc of history that goes beyond a prophecy of future (American) Christian calamity. Instead, the anti-jeremiad jeremiad is defined by a gothic uncanny that declares an irredeemable past, ongoing, and fallen future of settler sovereignty (91). In Apess, this genre once so expressive of nationalist-theology becomes an uncanny mode of history remaking, into and beyond Apess’ time.

Apess’ uncanny eulogy coheres his critique of the paradoxes of US settler sovereignty through what Mark Rifkin calls a “topos of inheritance” (Rifkin 352). Rifkin analyzes the ways “the rhetoric of fathers and children implies both a kind of familial resemblance and the transfer of property, indicating how the current generation benefits from while perpetuating the modes of imperial aggression pioneered by ‘the Pilgrims’ (352). Through the interwoven forms of “property and personhood” as a form of self-

possession, Rifkin reads the eulogy as unsettling the foundation of, and continually inherited, rhetoric of US settler liberalism, because “the history of settler occupation [has been] bequeathed to the United States by English colonial forebears” (“Settler States of Feeling” 343). Rifkin’s reading implicitly draws attention to the uncanniness of Apess’ tactics, tracing Apess’ language of inheritance as it challenges such inheritances:

However, rather than turning generational succession and the attendant inheritance of ownership of particular plots of territory into a metaphor distinguished from the literal bequeathing of an estate, Apess’ repeated invocation of the trope of parenthood emphasizes that the broader dynamics of expropriation and erasure he addresses are realized as quotidian forms of private landholding passed through legally recognized family lines. (352)

According to Rifkin, Apess uses the language of paternalism to draw attention to the material and legal “expropriation and erasure” in the every day inheritances of the settler state. Rifkin shows the ways inheritance, or possession acquired through someone’s death, takes (ghostly) national form, as “the continual reproduction of the national ‘we’ and ‘our’” depends on the theft of Indigenous lands, and “the topos of familial inheritance” connects “feelings of citizenship to property holding, indicating the experience of the national belonging is shaped by ongoing processes of settlement through which the national ‘we’ is given form” (ibid. 351). Though Rifkin is not attentive to the gothic uncanniness of Apess’ rhetorical method, when placed within the context of paternalistic appeals underwriting both Jacksonian removal and domestic dependency, Apess’s “topos of inheritance” becomes an uncanny historiographic strategy with clear implications for the politics of land use.

Apess’ “topos of inheritance” materializes. As if to give shape to the father whose figure floats over Apess’ paternalistic pleas, Apess ventriloquizes the then president and

father of paternalism, Andrew Jackson. Through Apess, Jackson's justifications drip with bloody irony:

We want your land for our use to speculate upon; it aids us in paying off our national debt and supporting us in Congress to drive you off. You see, my red children, that our fathers carried on this scheme of getting your lands for our use, and we have now become rich and powerful; and we have a right to do with you just as we please; we claim to be your fathers. And we think we shall do you a great favor, my dear sons and daughters, to drive you out, to get you out of the reach of our civilized people, for we have no law to reach them, we cannot protect you although you be our children." (307)

Still ventriloquizing Jackson, Apess concludes that "this has been the way our fathers first brought us up and it is hard to depart from it; therefore you should have no protection from us" (ibid. 307). Here, Apess exploits the language of inheritance to show its incoherence: the (dead-beat dad) government must steal their children's lands to pay off their debts. Moreover, through the doubling of the word "reach," Apess argues the (abusive) father must, for their children's benefit, drive the children away from them because the parent is the one responsible for hurting the children. Apess drains the magic out of Jackson's tautological sleight of hand: "We claim to be your fathers" but "we must continue in the ways our fathers first brought us up." Just like that, the Great Father of the US government is corporealized as a conman, pleading "our inheritances make us, paradoxically, the *inheritor* of your lands, at the same time that we are your progenitor. We should inherit your ancestral lands but our ancestry legitimates our refusal of any protective, paternal obligations." Apess' agile (re)articulation anticipates Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's reminder that "Indigenous sovereignty continues through the presence of Indigenous people and their land, haunting the house that Jack(son) built, shaking its foundations and rattling the picket fence" (31). In the context of the Marshall trilogy and

Jacksonian Removal, Apess' uncanny mimicry of settler-colonial-speak proves paternalism is just another proverb for property (theft).<sup>107</sup> Using the language of fathers, children, and inheritance, Apess is a forefather to current work placing settler colonial and whiteness studies into conversation with the environmental humanities.

Apess' uncanny use of US settler history, icons, literary form, and paternalistic logic reverberates into a harmonious critique of the "nature-as-property" refrain hallowed in *Nature* and forming the baseline of settler sovereignty's liberal cadence. Instead of relying on the language first popularized by Locke and Hobbes that used discourses of savagery to separate property from the state of nature, Apess eulogizes King Philip as "a son of nature, with nature's talents," "a man of natural abilities...the greatest man that was ever in America" (305, 308). According to Maureen Konkle's extensive work on Apess, Apess' primary aim is to "rehistoricize and depoliticize the state of nature to which whites confine Indians in demonstrating their inherent difference" to show that "the state of nature is a historical, not a permanent, condition" (Konkle 10). Calling King Philip "a man of natural abilities," Apess refigures the "state of nature" notion used to naturalize settler sovereignty to instead contest the *naturalization* of racial difference, revealing, "the liberal contract was in fact a settler contract" but pushes further to show claims of natural law belong to a form of white knowledge-making, not a disinterested fact but rather a self-interested assertion with a necrophilic underside (Dahl 293). Apess then uncannily redeploys the language associated with those assertions, entreating settlers to "only study the works of nature more" to understand white savagery (Apess 287). By

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<sup>107</sup> Laura Mielke regards this tension as one between sympathy and doom, between "benevolent paternalism and refusals to enforce federal laws and treaty agreements" (4). In addition to his affect, Deborah Gussman notes that Apess emphasizes Philip's masculine qualities to directly challenge domestic dependency (460).

recycling claims about what is or is not a part of nature, Apess inverts popular sovereignty's claim that property is natural, and he connects that fiction to whiteness.

Ultimately, Apess' uncanny historiography of nature-as-property suggests a genealogy of the triad of nature, property, and whiteness. Just as Cheyfitz reminded us that "property plots narrative," Apess adds that whiteness plots property—whiteness drives narrative strategies of the "natural," motivates strategic claims to property and territory, and digs plots to bury people by turning them in to property. Apess' uncanny methodology exposes settler sovereignty's uncanny Gothicism as plotted by property. Jean O'Brien reminds us that Apess was writing early in the nineteenth century, a time when the US federal government's main source of income was the sale of Indian land (298). Exploiting the language of property, Apess ironically warns that settlers should "use the colored people they have already around them like human beings, before they go convert any more" and relays King Philip's prophetic warning that "white people would not only cut down their groves but would enslave them" (287, 306). These two quotations, while disparate in the subject addressed as "they," link white people's insatiable and violent desire for land to resource depletion and enslavement. Apess unearths the insidiousness hiding in Locke's notion of land improved through labor, that "in the beginning was property," as haunted by the specter of whiteness. In the "Eulogy," the pales of whiteness, the "walls of prejudice built with untempered mortar" extend to all peoples of color (Apess 288). Apess shows the nature-as-property equivalence is nothing more than a rhetorical cloak for white supremacy, property theft, and environmental exploitation. When Apess parrots Jackson's petulant instance that "we want your lands and must have them and will have them," the quick shift from desire



(want) to determination (must have) to a matter of fact (will have) shows that property acquisition is a matter of inherited white rhetoric, not right (308). C.B. Macpherson famously termed this possessive individualism, the liberal individualism that defined by property in their own person which George Lipsitz later theorized as a possessive investment in whiteness. These scholars' ideas find an early expression in the violence of Jackson's popular sovereignty as it masquerades as progressive paternalism.

Through Apess' acute clarification, the supposed naturalness of property, or "naturalized sovereignties," is revealed to be a chilling form of white terror. When Apess says settler conquest is "something like many people wishing for their friends to die, that they might get their property," the gothic horror of white savagery is laid bare: settlers "like to see them slain and lain in heaps, and their bodies devoured by vultures and wild beasts of prey, and their bones bleaching in the sun and air, till they moulder away or were covered by the falling leaves of the forest" (Apess 389, 308). The text unsettles the supposed naturalness of white settler sovereignty, unearthing, in grotesque detail, its foundations built with "mutilated bodies, maimed animals, and ravaged property" (Lepore 57). Thus, Apess contests the language used to "legitimize and naturalize a social order that included slavery, Indian extermination, and territorial conquest" through the language of the natural (Scholnick 125). Indeed, Konkle reminds us that Apess is developing a critique of racial difference at the very moment that racial difference is being naturalized (Konkle 103).<sup>108</sup> Apess follows the link between such "naturalization" and racial formation, showing racial categories are inextricable from Indigenous

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<sup>108</sup> Following Charles Mills, Maureen Konkle cites the 1820-1840s as "racial modernity," the era where racial difference is becoming explicitly naturalized (40). Konkle notes that Apess' "Eulogy" attacks the notion of racial difference and shows how knowledge of racial difference is the foundation of the knowledge deployed to oppress Native peoples (134).

dispossession and the “assumption of white possession” (Aileen Moreton-Robinson 51). Apess unveils whiteness as the pale and perverse plot for property, one whose macabre nature he refuses to naturalize.

Thus, Apess’ “Eulogy” exposes the gruesomeness of white settler sovereignty as a built environment, speciously rendered as “natural” through history, literary genre, property, law, genocide, and terror. What is more, Apess goes beyond this important critique to suggest a future oriented, networked model of justice based on Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>109</sup> For Apess, “New England history *is* Indian history, along the way he exposes the racism honed in the colonial encounter, the false piety at the center of the colonial project” and the horrifying histories of white settlement (O’Brien 189). Apess details the gothic nature of white terror through grisly historical details because he recognized that cataloguing “the abuses committed against Native Americans over the course of two hundred years was a first step toward ensuring basic civil rights for people of color” (Lopezina 689). He was speaking in an era of “widespread racial violence, Indian removal, and tightening regulations of African Americans, free or slave” (Konkle 135). Indeed, Apess delivered his Eulogy just three months after a crowd paraded the likeness of William Garrison on a noose (Peyer 160). Konkle investigates Apess’ connection with African American abolitionist causes and their influences on him, finding “evidence of contact with African American and white anti-slavery writers to refute color as a signifier of difference and inferiority” (114-15). Konkle argues that those relationships allowed Apess to influence African American rights activists like

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<sup>109</sup> In an earlier draft, I described this as Apess’ intersectionality only to be reminded that the term implies the privileging of a critique of gender. Though Apess is certainly skewering what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls patriarchal white sovereignty, I choose to replace the term since this chapter is not explicitly focused on the gendered component of an intersectional critique.

David Walker and William Lloyd Garrison to think about and publish on the structure of settler colonialism. It is worth noting here that Apess was not immune to expressions of racism—he repeated an anti-Semitic equivalence that neither “Jew nor devil” could counterfeit the money King Philip’s people wrought (305). In that passage, it is difficult to definitively say whether Apess is parroting anti-Semitism or endorsing it. Either way, the comment reflects Apess’ complicated relationship with racial categories, complexity that was partially responsible for his (imperfect) critique of whiteness. Apess uses language of “whiteness” and “people of color” familiar to many today, but he also “refuses a racialized essence,” variously identifying himself as “Pequot, (pan-)Indian, colored, Christian, male, (first) American and embodiment of the Enlightenment notion of the ‘universal human’” (Dannenberg 66). Apess uses the language of race and nature to forward shared liberation, liberation from past, ongoing, and future white settler violence. In rewriting the past of King Philip with this language, as Eric Wolfe claims, the ultimate direction of the Eulogy is the future (19).

For Apess, exposing the gothic, gruesome and uncanny, nature of settler sovereignty establishes the base for a coalitional practice beyond the temporal, geographical, and philosophical pales of settler sovereignty. Apess advocates “not that we live up to the political ideals expressed in the nation’s founding documents, as if to fulfill and redeem the promise of their original meaning, but that we transform them into something they are not and have never quite been” (Dahl 303). In this space of “act as if,” Apess’ gothic uncanny performs a “dialectic of preoccupation,” Beth Piatote’s term for a productive anxiety that “contains an unstable contradiction. It is at once the iteration of sovereignty—in the sense that Native Americans preoccupied the land prior to

colonization—and that which contests it, to the extent that preoccupation is a form of anxiety produced by the reality of colonization” (103). According to Piatote, a text’s “figuring of preoccupation reflects indigenous sovereignty that is both durable and contingent” (103). Apess’ eulogy asserts Indigenous sovereignty through an uncanny version of this dialectic, what could also be understood as a form of Audra Simpson’s grammar of refusal, rejection of the supposed gifts of democracy through the tropes, literature, history, property law, and language of nature associated with settler democracy. The eulogy exposes the gothic core of settler sovereignty and, at the same time, carves out space for Indigenous sovereignty built on the return of the stolen wealth of land (via genocide) and labor (via slavery). Apess provides an early literary model of Indigenous resistance literature that refuses anti-blackness.<sup>110</sup> Most importantly, Apess exposes a fundamental link between whiteness, property, slavery, genocide, and settler sovereignty increasingly vital to contemporary racial and environmental justice activism. Thus, Apess’ Gothicism is a decolonial Gothic that effects shared liberation through a continuing critique of the ways the pales of settler sovereignty’s whiteness are haunted by a gothic nature. It suggests, then, the most important aspect of “New England” geography for the American environmental tradition is its vitality when reterritorialized as, properly, Indigenous space.

### **American Environmental Thought Beyond the Pale**

Inheritance is where property and history converge. In the context of U.S. settler colonialism, inheritance exposes the uncanny relationship between property, race, and settler sovereignty—an uncanny American obsession with inheritance without

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<sup>110</sup> Jace Weaver argues the eulogy is an important model of resistance literature and Renee Bergland cites Apess as forerunner to activism that many see originating with Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” (Weaver 55, Bergland 112).

inheritance, preoccupied with rightful transfer of property but disavowing of the genocidal natures of its history (and of its present). In explicit terms, American white settler sovereignty—the color of which Apress shows to be a redundancy—is possessed by possession, haunted by its uncanny obsession with rightful inheritance, defined by its gothic relationship to land and race.

Its Gothicism lay deep in the paradoxes of a country founded on Enlightenment principles of liberty and the pursuit of happiness (through property) without the burden of history and its supposedly “irrational claims” (Savoy 167). As many scholars have noted, Jefferson used “happiness” to replace Locke’s version of “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of property,” forming the beginning of a palimpsest of moral claims resting on, but papering over, “property.” In “The Rise of the American Gothic,” Eric Savoy argues, “The Gothic has stubbornly flourished in the United States. Its cultural role, though, has been entirely paradoxical: an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles of liberty and ‘the pursuit of happiness,’ a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow” (167). To quote an earlier footnote, this is quite relevant to Cheyfitz’s work that shows “title” to be the concept that linked possession and property and allowed for indigenous dispossession. This was in large part due to the Locke’s translation of the bible to suggest, “in the beginning was property” (*Poetics* 55).

In literary form, however, the American Gothic does more than merely reflect anxieties associated with white settler sovereignty, it offers uncanny insight into the ways those disquiets are deflected. We know from Toni Morrison that all readers of American

literature are positioned as white, which means a readership that must reckon with the reality of the Emersonian (and Locke-ian) “man” as self-made through violence. The American Gothic genre is also obsessed with a return of the past in ways that can remember those histories. The American Gothic genre is possessed by a return of the past without a past, and thus offers a study of the ways white national anxiety sublimates and refigures inheritance.

Thus, as many scholars note, the American Gothic offers an exceptional historiographic function.<sup>111</sup> Scholars such as Teresa Goddu in her formative study *Gothic America: Narrative, History, Nation* demand that all gothic tales be historicized, placed in relation to history and examined for what historiography they reveal. Goddu argues that scholars must place texts in their historical and historiographic contexts, and thus expose the contradictions of American national myth “that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality” (10). Reading *Nature*, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” and “The Eulogy on King Philip” shows that the American Gothic’s obsession with rightful inheritance and the transfer of property is haunted by history. Treating the gothic as historiography allows us to identify the ways in which that possession drives plots—narratives, land claims, schemes, and burial plots. It also allows us to identify the ways those plots are inherited, articulate something like an American Gothic of white settler sovereignty, and are

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<sup>111</sup> Scholars have focused on the racial dimension, the frontier, the ecogothic, or the American Imperial Gothic, among others, to understand the specter of history and national violence within the genre. As mentioned earlier, Fields and Morrison tie the genre to a history of racial conflict. Mogen, Sanders, Karpinsky regard the racial dimension of the American Gothic as expressed in the space and notion of the Frontier. Contributors to Mogen, Sanders, Karpinsky’s volume read the frontier for the ways the landscape itself represents a gothic power of wilderness images projecting “a vengeful energy that threatens annihilation of the ‘white psyche’” because “the history of the Other speaks from the landscape” (15,16). Similarly, a recent collection explores the ecogothic by locating nature as space of crisis, a point of contact with ecological that reflects human guilt. The American Imperial Gothic sees these anxieties as especially potent once American Imperialism turned outward to territorialize foreign countries. In truth, the burdens of the American Imperial Gothic have been with the country and the literary genre since colonization.

uncannily attended by what the nation would like to forget. This American Settler Gothic recognizes race and racial anxiety as always bound up in what and how the land can produce, linking horrific US histories of genocide and slavery to concepts of nature, race, and the privileged position of liberal subject hood (Hong 13). Attention to the uncanny nature of settler sovereignty, its literary relics and systems of racialization and environmental exploitation, can help draw out the ways the American Gothic also has been used beyond the genre's settler-sovereign surfaces.

Historicizing these texts, and treating them as gothic historiographies, allows us to identify the importance of what the American Gothic reveals for contemporary environmental justice concerns. The uncanny nature of the American gothic genre suggests that a critique of settler sovereignty, its possessive inheritances and systems of racialization and environmental exploitation, constitute an altogether different American environmental imagination lurking in the genre. This alternative centers 'mourning death and understanding death as proliferative' where the land itself performs a kind of resistance, a kind of historical work at genre's territorial edges testifying to the survival of endangered species for over five hundred years (Hong 15).

The territories of King Philip's War, the spaces of Lovewell's fight, and the Mashpee revolt are all rooted in the same ideological and geographical Gothicism of settler space.<sup>112</sup> And they represent histories crucial for environmental politics today. The environmental history proposed by tracing this gothic tradition is one that recognizes the birthplace of King Philip, Mount Hope, as not just a place whose past testifies to genocide and Indigenous survival, but whose present deserves the attention of

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<sup>112</sup> King Philips War took place in what is commonly known today as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maine. Lovewell's Fight occurred in what is currently called Fryeburg, Maine, and the Mashpee Revolt occurred on Cape Cod.

environmental and social justice activists alike.<sup>113</sup> Through these texts, we see how that struggle has a gothic history with a present environmental politic.

Most useful for American environmental thought, these texts complicate a well-worn origin story that begins with an ahistorical text like *Nature* that is so devoted to property. In its stead, Apess's "Eulogy" joins and betters "Roger Malvin's Burial" to constitute an alternative and gothic American environmental history exigent to contemporary climate justice struggles. In their uncanny doubling, their inversions of colonial tropes and narrative modes, both Apess' "Eulogy on King Philip" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial" suggest a gothic environmental imagination that complicate US settler sovereignty (hi)stories of free land and unobstructed title. In Hawthorne's frontier tale, the oak and the rock mark the ground upon which rests Roger Malvin's unburied bones, just as Apess' eulogy shows that land and property signify the macabre nature of settler sovereignty and its haunted, possessive, and perverse whiteness. Most exigent for an anti-racist environmental archive, Apess' eulogy offers both an early intersectional indictment of systems of racial and environmental exploitation and a testimonial of shared liberation.

Both Hawthorne and Apess in their own way deepen the implications of what Aaron Sachs calls the "arcadian gothic" for American environmental politics. In *Arcadian America*, Sachs traces American environmental thinking back to the tradition of garden-cemetery rather than the commonly cited establishment of national parks. Sachs' study shows that, beginning with Mount Auburn, antebellum cemeteries took death and

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<sup>113</sup> The most recent conflict over Mount Hope resulted in Brown University giving some of those lands back to the Pokonoket peoples.



decay as a part of a landscape's beauty, regarding such death-in-life as signifying an environmental embeddedness rather than separation.

The land that holds what Emerson dismisses as the “dry bones of the past” also holds Roger Malvin's unburied bones and all the scattered parts of King Philip's body. The land itself testifies to the violence of settler sovereignty, its land theft, its brutal systems of slavery, its hypocrisy, and its historical amnesia. Just as Sachs describes cemeteries offering an alternative environmental history signifying an ethic of communal care, Hawthorne and Apess' texts present another type of memorial, where the land itself signifies a history of violence necessary for contemporary environmental imaginations to commemorate. When Reuben fires the shots that kill his son in an area marked by the “withered, sapless, and utterly dead” oak and the rock “not unlike a gigantic gravestone,” the narrator asks “Whose guilt had blasted it?” This question should be directed toward all of American environmental history—past, present, and future. As allegories of the gothic nature of US settler sovereignty expressed in celebrations that masquerade as history, both stories clarify that the fate of the nation is uncannily rooted in the very land under contention. Both offer gothic historiographies more responsive and responsible for American environmental history than Emerson's oft-cited *Nature*.

While many cite *Nature* as inaugurating both the American literary renaissance and American environmental thought, the text should more readily be regarded as a paradigm text of gothic disavowal linked to US settler sovereignty and its histories of Indian removal and chattel slavery. If the text is responsible for ushering in something, it is the inaugural union of nation, literary natures, and nature-as-property. That union is a principle technology of dispossession and enslavement. If what makes American fiction

so gothic, according to Morrison and Fielder (though each differently focused), is the bloody, sinister, chilling terror that is at once hidden and drives US white national anxiety, then the gothicism of *Nature* helps us identify a fundamental element of the uncanny at the core of American literary and environmental history, obsessed as it is with a national literary tradition built from an environment that is not home. We see through *Nature* that US settler sovereignty is preoccupied by and with territory at the same time as it is haunted by its deterritorialized and deterritorializing status. America is haunted by the status of and an uncanny regard for property as the highest form of social order.

Each of these texts offers a palimpsest of history that answers what happens when we regard nature itself as carrying critical capacity to comment on the gothic elements of national fictions. As “History invents the gothic and, in turn, the gothic reinvents history,” Emerson’s gothic *Nature* offers not a proto-environmentalism but rather exemplifies the gothic amnesia of settler sovereignty, where property plots the narrative of white land claims, schemes, narratives, and burial markers (Goddu 132). In contrast, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” unearths the gothic disavowal of settler sovereignty’s structures and “The Eulogy on King Philip” traces a consistent and haunted history of white terror from past to present to propose liberation beyond the pales of settler sovereignty. In that, Hawthorne and Apess’ texts offer a cogent response to the declaration that began this chapter, where Sara L. Crosby lamented, “Horror is becoming the environmental norm” (514). Emerson’s erasure, Hawthorne’s ambivalence, and Apess’ intersectionality show that the gerund “becoming” is imprecise and the “norm” refers to the milieu of Emerson’s “man.”

In truth, horror has always been the American environmental norm, associated as it is with the pallor of whiteness. These texts suggest a slight but generative modification of Crosby's observation. Instead of claiming horror is *becoming* the environmental norm, these texts show that horror has historically been regarded as *unbecoming to* the environmental norm. By using the gothic to expose the paradoxical horrors of settler sovereignty—the gruesome, grisly histories hidden in liberal discourse—an alternative environmental history is born. Rather than originating with *Nature*, American environmental history can be rooted in the unsettling suggestions of Hawthorne's short story and the forceful assertions of Apess's eulogy. That alternative origin dethrones the "man" of *Nature*, denaturalizes its naturalized sovereignty, upends the pales of settler colonial fictions. With this new origin story, the body of the nation can no longer be imagined as a universalized white, property owning man. Chapter III examines this body of nature's nation.

## CHAPTER III

### STOLEN NATURES:

#### NATIONAL ALLEGORY AND THE CONFIDENCE GAME OF THE

#### AMERICAN COMMONS

“[S]tealing, speculation, appropriation—all the corollaries of ownership in the settler colony, where the mystical foundation of colonial sovereignty is persistently and doggedly repeated by the highest legal authorities in the land.”

– Brenda Bhandar, *The Colonial Lives of Property*, 74

“This fundamental national plot involved selling something that does not rightly belong to you.”

– Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 142

“But dispossession is not normal, nor is a thing of the past. It is not done—it is a doing.”

– Joanne Barker, “Territory as Analytic,” 31

In December 2017, a full-page ad in the *New York Times* arrested audience attention. Its stark black background was populated with the striking white words: “The President Stole Your Land.” This accusation was underwritten with a byline that continued: “In an illegal move, the president just reduced the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. This is the largest elimination of protected land in American history.” The ad, sponsored by the outdoor retailer and environmental activist company Patagonia, did little to stop what was recently referred to as an “‘Outrageous’ Gold-Rush Style Grab of Public Lands,” which opened up the areas for mining, drilling, and other forms of privatized resource extraction (Corbett).<sup>114</sup> In response, groups like Monuments for All echoed Patagonia’s dissent and warned over Twitter that, “America’s heritage is under attack.” In this debate, American public lands are framed as a national birthright or excess in need of privatization. This debate occurs

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<sup>114</sup> For a short summary of “What the Shrinkage of Bears Ears Means for Indian Country,” see Gilio-Whitaker.

at the very same moment that assertions of “not enough to go around” justify the militarization of the United States southern border with Mexico, concentration camps of tents filling with children seeking refuge. Admidst these conditions, Patagonia’s alert that “The President Stole Your Land” invites the questions: What constitutes the American public and its lands? To whom do the United States and its commons belong? Who or what makes up the “Your” that the ad addresses?

Typically, queries concerning the commons in America—the who, what, when, where, and how of public lands—are answered in the metonymic mode. Through the magic of metaphor, America is personified, en fleshed through the protagonistic protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (property). These rights, secured in the social contract of liberalism, constitute the personhood of the U.S. nation state, constructing the sovereignty of the nation through its petty sovereigns who themselves enjoy property in their own person.<sup>115</sup> Ownership, and in particular land owning, is the cornerstone of American national identity (Dunbar-Ortiz 129). It is what *makes* the American citizen. In this way, what constitutes the public common to Western sovereignty is an embodied fractal, the individual a mirror of the nation-state. In this replicating mode, the national allegory of the United States mediates the commons. It naturalizes the freedoms of liberalism’s contract—universalizing confidence in the Lockean formula of freedom through property as a way to ignore the obvious question of

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<sup>115</sup> Here I combine C.B. Macpherson’s work on “possessive individualism,” which argues that the political theory of the same regards an individual as the sole proprietor of his or her skills and owes nothing to society, with Chad Luck’s *The Body of Property*, which reveals the body as the crucial “site at which ownership is ultimately inscribed” (8). Together with Brenda Bhandar’s *The Colonial Lives of Property*, which shows that “legal forms of property ownership and the modern racial subject are articulated and realized in conjunction with one another,” we can imagine the United States as a version of the frontice piece of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, where the sovereign is made up of all the persons who have consented to the rule of the king in exchange for protection from the nastiness and brutishness of nature (5).

inequality dogging liberal contracts to this day.<sup>116</sup> Namely, what happens when newly incorporated peoples, pledging allegiance to the property plots uniting the states, are refused the rights associated with their status? Patagonia's ad offers a micro-version of this universalized but unequal commons.

Patagonia's ad allegorizes not an anomaly of American history, but rather an inherited and ongoing system of land theft out of which the commons of the United States is continually created. The bloody truth is that North American history is written *through* the continuous theft of Indigenous lands, elimination through violence, broken treaties, and, often, in the name of "protection." This thievery is the quintessential and unchanged allegory for America, whitewashed in the ad's visual drama and textual rhetoric and the "Your" that recruits its audience into its colonial cahoots.<sup>117</sup> Patagonia's brief ad tells a story about the nation, the public, and its lands. It is a national allegory of the American commons that determines who gets to enjoy the rights associated with full American citizenship and what amnesia is common to those commons.

Turning back to the initial 1850s gold-rush-giveaways invoked in current criticism of the administration's rulings, this chapter looks to three ways the commons were figured through national allegory—as utopian, satirical, and dystopian spaces. It turns first to the utopian commons, reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* for the

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<sup>116</sup> See Onur Ulas Ince's *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism*, which explores the "constitutive and contradictory relationship between capitalism, liberalism, and empire" (1).

<sup>117</sup> The issues that arise in discussions of the commons—namely whose commons and for what purposes—often reinforce or assume a public that is, in fact, particular to white settler subjects. As a settler-scholar raised by uninvited hippies, loggers, and mill workers on Kalapuyailihi (Kalapuya homeland) in what is currently referred to as Eugene, Oregon, I frequently find myself implicit to the public universalized in, and made invisible by, debates over public lands. From my vantage point in the middle of this "we" supposedly anticipating or already suffering under the threatened loss of the commons, it is difficult to decipher the language commoning settler colonial capitalism, making it, as it were, so ordinary as to be almost invisible. Almost.

insidious idealism of the how the commons are regarded within the mainstream American environmental tradition and what that means for environmental activism like Patagonia's. It then turns to two novels from the same time period that offer allegories of the U.S. nation state that explicitly critique the economies of dispossession that often go unquestioned in discussions of the commons—especially in the context of a changing climate where the “commons” often overwrites the consideration of history and power relations. Rather than the utopian imaginings of *Blithedale Romance*, Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* unsettles the naturalization of an American commons and instead suggests it better understood as a “devil's lane”—a colloquialism for a contested plot of land between two neighbors. That contested space is the setting of the third book this chapter will discuss, Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*. *Murieta* is a transnational revenge tale that uses the person-as-nation formulation of national allegory to denaturalize what is common to the nation—namely the white universal subject, and the constellation of mobility, property, and nature that underwrites settler colonial capitalism's extraction economies beyond the shifting boundaries of the nation-state.

In a current moment marked by the exigency of a changing climate, disputes over the commons are often relegated to a scarcity or universalist model. The scarcity model was repopularized by Garrett Hardin's “Tragedy of the Commons” and often takes the form of arguments about an over-burdened planet (commons) without regard for the nuances of who/what/where produce those burdens. Likewise, the universalist, ahistorical version of the commons argues that everyone should be guaranteed unrestricted access, without acknowledging how systems of consent, ability, and capital accumulation effect

how people come to the commons. Neither of these visions of the commons adequately attends to systems of power nor to the versions of the commons outside the scarcity versus unlimited binary. Instead, this chapter aims to theorize the commons through three national allegories that idealize, satirize, and disturb the who, what, when, and where of the American commons at the very moment that what constituted the nation underwent significant—indeed continental—shifts.

In truth, in the United States, what constitutes “public lands” has never been stable. Notions of the public and their commons have been a fickle matter of political contest and power relations since before the beginning of what is currently called America. Today, who and what serve to underwrite, define, and profit from the “Gold rush era giveaway” of public lands rightly tie us back to the gold rush-era of the 1850s, a time when the U.S. desired and came to inhabit a newly continental body. Just as Henry David Thoreau’s 1848 “Resistance to Civil Government” described his protest of the war with Mexico, arguing criminality was a patriotic duty employed for justice, protest of what America does in the name of its “public” is a foundational part of the same American heritage. The current “Gold rush era giveaway” refers to an era that never went away. Neither did the idealism inspiring critics like Thoreau.

Less than 200 years ago, what is currently known as the continental United States was formed virtually over night. In 1848, war with Mexico—a war waged under pressure to secure a passage to the Pacific, the profits from gold and silver mines, and the “future limits of the United States”—concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which articulated these “future limits” as the newly incorporated body of continental American empire. The treaty increased the land mass of the nation by a third and incorporated



communities across the southwest and west into the natural body of U.S. liberal subject-hood—though citizenship was unevenly extended to Mexicans before many Native Americans were eligible. This shift in territoriality rewrote borders and being: some outlaws became citizens and some citizens became criminals as the plotlines of the American commons were redrawn, accommodating the supposedly universal guarantees that Locke lauded.

Just two years later, the Fugitive Slave Act required all escaped slaves to be returned to their masters, even if found on free soil, while the 1850 “Donation Land Claim Act” promoted settlement of the west by granting free land to white men, to married women, and to “half-blood” Native Americans.<sup>118</sup> In the span of two years, notions of equality were extended to (white) women and mixed race Native peoples in the form of property ownership, while the status of African Americans as property exceeds State territorial boundaries. This era, too, was marked by an increasingly hegemonic “Angophilia,” an obsession characterizing the author of the first text of American environmentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1856 *English Traits*. This text, especially with its core chapter entitled “Race,” created what Nell Irvin Painter’s *The History of White People* called the a “white racial ideal” summed up in what Emerson considered to count as an American public: when he “tallies up the American population, Emerson explicitly excludes the enslaved and skips over Native people entirely” (Painter 185). In 1850s America, as the right to own property, to possess land or people, constituted

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<sup>118</sup> The Donation Land Claim Act became law on September 27, 1850 and granted 320 acres to every unmarried white male citizen eighteen or older and 640 acres to every married couple, each owning half in their own name. The law was one of the first that allowed married women in the United States to hold property under their own name. “Half-blood Native Americans” were also eligible. Claimants were required to live on the land and cultivate it for four years to own title.

citizenship to the American body, the constitution of that body was undergoing radical and highly contested transformation.

So stretched, the allegory of American national body did not, could not, hold. Immediately following the Treaty, as Lauren Berlant's study of *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* notes, American national identity was crisis-ed by that failure: "Under the pressure of slavery, economic transformation, rapid territorial expansion, and imperialist impulses, American national identity was in a legitimation crisis in the 1850s ... The United States, as we know it, was not inevitable, despite the 'American'-utopian claims of its always already constituted status" (Berlant 78). The rush to continental settlement both depended upon and was justified through the creation of a US nation-state with clear territorial boundaries, even as those boundaries did not yet exist—it was a moment when the not-yet and the always already collided because, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, "The white nation cannot exist as such without land and clearly defined borders; it is the legally defined and asserted territorial sovereignty that provides the context for national identifications" (30). Indeed, Berlant and Moreton-Robinson draw attention to a contingency animating the utopian American allegorical imagination, a contradiction internal to 1850s United States that continues to plague debates over public lands today.

What does it mean to invoke a notion of public lands as the natural heritage of American national identity when the boundaries of the nation's rights-guarantees are so clearly unevenly defined? How is the communal formed in the face of such contestations? What are the stakes of environmental activism aimed at ensuring a commons for all? Where national allegory is theorized to be a matter of "first" or "third" world literature, this chapter regards American national allegory as internally fractured

and multiply–constituted out of the violent theft of territories and lifeworlds that make up many Native nations. This chapter thus investigates the politics of criminality, theft, and the commons in American national allegory, asking how the American allegorical anxieties of the 1850s—in their utopian, satirical, and dystopian forms—can inform how we constitute the commons and their publics today.

### **Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance* and the Utopian Commons**

The American environmental tradition, within which Patagonia likely defines itself, often imagines the commons through a utopian lens that, too, harkens back to mid-nineteenth century America. The idealized autonomy achieved through shared space is often said to belong to a history of land use that existed prior to the English enclosure of the commons.<sup>119</sup> That pre-enclosure commons is canonized in the American environmental imagination through mid-nineteenth century projects like Fruitlands, founded by Charles Lane and Amos Bronson Alcott, and Brook farm, established by Unitarian ministers and the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne fictionalized his experience at Brook farm in his 1852 *Blithedale Romance*, one of Hawthorne’s “American novels” that depicts an Arcadian experiment in the commons likely recognizable to communal projects in America today, in both their utopianism and their contradictions (Berlant 6).

Just as chapter 1 showed in Emerson’s *Nature*, Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance* is more significant and instructive than its supposedly emblematic status in the broader American environmental tradition. As the novel narrates the doomed idealism of the Brook farm experiment, its self-conscious and ironic utopian allegory explores the

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<sup>119</sup> The work of Fortier, Greer, Frederici, and Linebaugh all make clear that the pre-enclosure English commons was not a space of utopian equal-access, as it is often depicted in contemporary invocations.

paradoxes inherent in the American commons. Hawthorne's skepticism toward utopian projects is made clear in the novel's "double" genre. Though titled a romance, it does not seem to conform to some of the most generic of romantic expectations—the novel is not centered on a romantic pairing nor does it end optimistically. And though its preface denies the story is an allegory, the novel's satire is nearly impossible not to read as a general statement on American national identity, where the utopianism of national space is dogged by a problem of proper ownership. The notion of proper ownership foundational to American national identity claims a commons through the moral right to private property, though those claims themselves are built on violent theft of lands.

The paradox of making communal property *through* private property—that was itself made through violence and deceit—is easily seen in the purchase of property for both Fruitlands and Brook farm experiments that, in the (ostensibly un-ironic) words of Bronson Alcott's announcement in *The Dial*, "liberates this tract of land from human ownership" (qtd. in Packer 148). Making communal lands through private property purchase is an irony that suggests Hawthorne's romance is less romantic than an allegory for how deceitful the bedrock of reality can be. In its dark vision, the novel allegorizes a commons constituted in theft, a utopianism that must forget the dystopic means of fencing necessary for its formation. In this, the novel allegorizes the utopian imagined community of the US nation state more broadly, in the narrative equivalent to Berlant's reminder that the American utopian imagination asserts permanence, an "always already constituted status" amidst its own uncertainty (8). *Blithedale Romance* narrates this desire for permanence, so sought after in the "racialized and gendered phenomenon" of nineteenth century homesteading, as a meta-allegory for the American commons

(Bhandhar 58). Through *Blithedale*, the American romance with a commons is riddled with the anxieties of its willed amnesia.

The anxious amnesia of the American commons is emblemized in the ways the novel establishes the who and what, the where and when, and the how of American utopian projects. The who and what of the commons is clear when the characters are deciding the community's appellation. The narrator remarks that "We should have resumed the old Indian name of the premises, had it possessed the oil-and-honey flow," both invoking a myth of Eden but explicitly linking it to resource extraction by substituting "oil" for milk in the Zionist paradise narrative (35). When read as national allegory, this first suggested name reveals a link between manifest destiny and capital resource extraction, as well as the erasure of Indigenous presence necessary for both. Still, since the "old Indian name" "chanced to be a harsh, ill-connected, and interminable work, which seemed to fill the mouth with a mixture of very stiff clay and very crumbly pebbles," the name resists the colonists' claims—its refusal to expire (it is interminable) and its refusal to be consumed (its the inedible stuff of clay and pebbles) (35). The Native ancestral "inheritance" of the land, its belonging to the Massachuset and Wampanoag peoples, is acknowledged insofar as it provides something for the colonists, too, to extract, but, proving too difficult a substance to manipulate, the name is ultimately rejected. Through the rejection of the rightful inhabitants of that place and their claims to it, the who and what of the settler commons are established.

Likewise, the novel narrates the when, where, and how of the American commons achieved through erasure, allegorized in the founders' first designated land at Blithedale: a burial plot. One of the central characters asks, "Would it not be well, even before we

have absolute need of it, to fix upon a spot for a cemetery? Let us choose the rudest, roughest, most uncultivable spot, for Death's garden-ground; and Death shall teach us to beautify it, grave by grave" (119). This initial act of the Blithedale settlement telegraphs a fetishization of death as a place of growth, a garden at the center of the Elysian project as a utopian version of the regeneration through violence that Richard Slotkin detailed. More importantly, this first founding action acknowledges the implicit longing for a genealogical relationship to the land motivating the "colonists at Blithedale." The novel literalizes the link between people and land that is crucial for national identity through this burial plot, anticipating in its allegory the *Freedom Through Violence* that Chandran Reddy describes in neoliberal terms today (69). As the cemetery retroactively establishes the colonists as belonging to that place, it manufactures a "settler nativism," a form of what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call settler moves to innocence (153). "Settler nativism" asserts the settlers' endemic relationship to the land via claims of native ancestry and stewardship in absentia of native peoples.

The cemetery plot at Blithedale allegorizes this nativism, formalizing the when and where of the commons in some forecasted future where settler ancestors are able to visit the graves of the people that died to establish these commons. At the same time, as the rejection of the "old Indian name" suggests, the commons is plotted through a refusal of the actual Native people who have lived and died with that land for thousands of years as well as those who live in the here and now of the novel's time. This commons-as-burial-plot signifies the death at the center of the life of the settler commons, an allegory for the US nation state. The American commons is, at Blithedale, established through a willful ignorance of the tragedies it is built upon. As if to make clear, the chapter titled

“Modern Arcadia” thus begins: “May-Day-I forget,” presaging the ways the American commons is built through erasure.

Though classified as romance, *The Blithedale Romance* concludes that the commons are the natural territory of tragedy, typified in the novel’s final scenes. In the last group gathering, the narrator finds the Blithedale community in masquerade.

Someone is dressed as “an Indian chief, with blanket, feathers and war-paint,” while others pose as:

a negro of the Jim-crow order, one or two foresters of the middle ages, a Kentucky woodsman in his trimmed hunting-shirt and deerskin leggings, and a Shaker elder, quaint, demure, broad-brimmed, and square-skirted. Shepherds of Arcadia, and allegorical figures from the Faerie Queen, were oddly mixed up with these. Arm in Arm, or otherwise huddled together, in strange discrepancy, stood grim Puritans, gay Cavaliers, and Revolutionary Officers... So they joined hands in a circle, whirling round so swiftly, so madly, and so merrily, in time and in tune with the Satanic music, that their separate incongruities were blended all together. (188)

The community is here condensed a parody of characters essential to American national myth, all madly and merrily joined as “their separate incongruities... blended all together.” The commons here is at last reduced to a paradigmatic performance of the playing Indian that Phil Deloria describes. In this scene, the novel regards “playing Indian” as one routine recital among many in the swirling mass of mythic American identity formation. The scene extrapolates what Tuck and Yang critique in modern homesteading, where “the practice of re-settling urban land in the fashion of self-styled pioneers in a mythical frontier ... can also become a form of playing Indian, invoking Indigeneity as ‘tradition’” in the comic alchemy of American national mythos (28). This performance is further condensed when the narrator leaves the party and stumbles on some wood left by the “former possessor of the soil” who he imagines as a “long dead

woodsman, and his long dead wife and children, coming out of their chilly graves” (190). In its conclusion, the utopian community is collapsed into a single patriarchal possessor of the soil, an American Adam metonym of the national commons whose wife and children are mere attendants to his life cycle. The community becomes this single patriarchal hero, buried in a plot bound by the settler-gone-native arc of colonial possession.

In finalizing the back-to-the-future scenario the Blithedale colonists began when they plotted their cemetery, the circularity of the novel mimics the tragic tautology of private property inhered in the American commons. Where claims of *terra nullius* were used to justify the slaughter and deceit of Native peoples in the name of private property, that private property was used as evidence of moral superiority and American national identity. Out of that private property was made the American commons.

In tracing this circularity, the novel seems to argue that the commons has tragedy built in—a conclusion punctuated by the suicide of the queenly leader of the commune, Zenobia, at the end of the novel. Following the masquerade party, Zenobia decries her former love Hollingsworth as a selfish man who regards others in the community for his own purposes, as his property. Zenobia scorns him: “Self! Self! Self! You have embodied yourself in a project. You are a better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is self-deception!” (195). Hollingsworth dismisses Zenobia’s claims as nothing more than “a woman’s view” and the narrator, having witnessed their exchange, concludes, “Hollingsworth could have no fault. That was the one principle at the centre of the universe” (197). Soon after, Zenobia drowns herself. Concluding as it does in the reduction of the community to characters of U.S. national myth, and that community’s



dissolution in the selfishness of patriarchal desire to possess, the novel performs a tragedy of the commons that shores up the innocence-making intrinsic to U.S nationalism – in all the figures that populate the community of the novel, it ends with Hollingsworth the ideological offspring of this “long dead woodsman.” This utopian “imagined community” is not only established–named and plotted–though erasure of the violent theft it is built upon, it then continues to naturalize the violences of its occupation as the inevitable life and death cycle of human selfishness acting in the context of the commons.

This scarcity model used to justify the settler commons is a logic that persists today. It was re-popularized in 1968 by Garrett Hardin in a piece that took the assumed inevitability of “human” selfishness and resource overuse as premises for privatization. Arguing against what he saw as the inevitable “tragedy of the commons,” Hardin limited his engagement with the concept to a romanticized Euro-centric intellectual tradition that neglects the *exclusive* nature of most commons known to that very same history, offering a neoliberal apologia that updated social Darwinism for an audience made anxious by the political revolt marking that period.<sup>120</sup>

*Blithedale* fictionalizes the tragedy of Hardin’s commons. Both universalize “human selfishness” as the death knell of shared land and resources, with the inevitable threat of loss erasing structures of power. Instead, the novel could have acknowledged the brutal history that the land they are on carries. The characters could have commented on the instrumentalization and expendability of women in the community at Blithedale, clarifying Zenobia’s suicide for the community not just the reader. Instead, the tragedy of

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<sup>120</sup> For a thorough and astute analysis of Hardin’s piece, see Rob Nixon’s “Neoliberalism, Genre, and the ‘Tragedy of the Commons.’” Nixon’s article is a vital preamble to recent engagement around the 50-year anniversary of Hardin’s work featured in the special issue of *Theoretical Inquires in Law*, especially David Schor’s contribution entitled “Savagery, Civilization, and Property: Theories of Societal Evolution and Commons Theory.”

the communalism depicted by Hardin and satirized by Hawthorne offers an allegory for the ways the commons works to mask the contradictions internal to the US nation-state. Though Hawthorne's novel makes a slightly more sophisticated argument regarding the ways performance and identity shape idealism and interactions with the commons, the novel is essentially the romantic narrative correlate to Hardin's tragic essay, unless we read it as allegory.

As an allegory of the utopian commons, the novel remains as recognizable to today's environmental movements as Hardin's argument. Yet, the novel's reach extends beyond the romantic/tragic binary of a utopian project that inevitably disintegrates into greed, death, and collapse. *Blithedale Romance* instead allegorizes the American romance itself—where romance is literally, as Walter Benn Michaels reminds us, “the text of clear and unobstructed title” (95). As an allegory of American romance, *Blithedale Romance* exposes the American utopian commons to be a romance that exonerates American democracy's contradictory formation in the dystopias of violence, tragedy, and theft. Though Hollingsworth is acquitted by the narrator, the novel itself shows the supposed inevitable collapse of the community, the tragedy of the commons due to the universal selfishness of human nature, to be a ruse. The novel ends with the narrator musing on the community's failure, with a bleak tongue-in-cheek resolve that if there were any cause worth dying for that “did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble—methinks I might be bold enough to offer up my life” (220). The satirical end suggests the inevitability of collapse is part of the romance of the commons, but that romance is upheld in the continual and convenient tragedy. In this way, *Blithedale Romance* allegorizes more than just a utopian communal project – it mirrors the innocence making

project of the American commons, where utopia entails the contradiction of a romance built on and regenerated through tragedy. This is, in *Blithedale's* romance, a paradox common to the American national project.

### **National Allegory: Fencing in White Possession**

As a broad genre, national allegory was not theorized as a form of literary production that takes the nation state as its essential subject until Frederic Jameson's (much criticized) attempt to define all "third-world literature" as national allegory.<sup>121</sup> Yet, when national allegory is conceptualized as the narrative correlate to formative theorizations of the nation state such as that of Benedict Anderson, we can better acknowledge the most astute of Jameson's insights—the form itself is inextricable from capitalism, colonialism, and ritual. We are also better able to incorporate criticisms of Jameson's initial formulation, which open to a less conscripted theory of the form. Namely, we are able to understand national allegory as the narrative of the nation that is, like the nation itself, plagued by internal difference even as it aims at homogeneity (Anderson 5, Bhabha). Anderson terms the universality of the nation an *Imagined Community*, a fictional "us" that Homi Bhabha, who follows Ernst Renan's famous answer to his titular "What is a Nation?" question, later argues has a narrative imperative to ignore or *forget* the historical contingency of its own origin in order to profess its timelessness (3).

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<sup>121</sup> Defining national allegory in terms of the first, second, and third world, Jameson's now notorious article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" has been thoroughly critiqued for collapsing hugely divergent cultural traditions into a singular, hierarchical, and Eurocentric relations that assumed the first world somehow beyond the need for national allegory, and the third world forever beholden to it because of their place in the global capitalist order. Aijaz Ahmad's critique is the most well known of those arising in immediate response to Jameson, though many have since returned to Jameson's piece to parse more of a nuanced ventriloquism of the "master-code" of colonialism rather than a strict endorsement (McGonegal 261).

Theories of nationalism have been, even from Renan's late nineteenth century iteration, emphatic about an internal dissonance in the nation state—a dynamism that adds political exigency to Jameson's insistence on the role of capitalism and colonialism in national allegory. Taking these theorists together, national allegory emerges as the story of the nation narrating itself as a singular body—over and against the realities of colonialism's internal fractures and the continuously shape shifting of capitalism's uneven development.

In the American context, national allegory has always been a nervously forged narrative pretending at naturalism. Following Cheryl Walker's definition of national allegory as the imagination of the U.S. nation as a person, the central character of the nation-state personifies a secular-sovereign that emerges, as Benedict Anderson's work shows, with the “revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism” (Walker 34, Anderson 39). This secular Protestant, capitalist Sovereign is best understood through Wendy Brown's characterization of sovereignty as a “supremely masculine political fantasy” that assumes a universal subjecthood through the liberalism of John Locke (Brown 119). John Locke “secularized the covenant” by regarding “private property capable of making the King” (Dunbar-Ortiz 114, 117).<sup>122</sup> Thus, even if we abide by social contract theorists who tell of a nature that bestows the right to private property, the settler colonial state must reckon with the truth that sovereignty—supposedly given—is achieved by the act of *taking* what does not belong to the settler.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> “Possession of the earth,” as Andro Linklater's history of land ownership reveals, “was deemed to be derived from the royal charter that granted territory to a company or a powerful proprietor” (29).

<sup>123</sup> Hobbes writes that sovereignty “gives life and motion to the whole body” and “Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man, as in many things, so in this also imitated.”

Locke epitomizes the fantasy of sovereignty that Brown describes, naturalizing an altogether irresolvable tension between democracy and the dominion associated with colonial monarchy. The person-as-nation in American allegory represents the anxiety described in Dunbar-Ortiz's admonition that "affirmation of democracy requires a denial of colonialism" while also embodying Kevin Bruyneel's reminder that "liberal democratic and colonial impulses are not always contradictory" (Dunbar-Ortiz 116, Bruyneel 6). The main character of American national allegory enfleshes this tension—he is the hero of liberal democracy and, at the same time, the villain of dispossession. It is this duality that is naturalized via "the natural" in the central character of American national allegory.

The Lord-man-hero of American national allegory derives his freedom from domination of land and market, embodying the paradox of the "natural." What Lauren Berlant calls "an intense, complex, and conceptually incoherent manhood" in Hawthorne's exploration of the state and its "constitutional transformation of embodied white 'men' into abstract 'persons'" can be extrapolated to American national allegory, which denies the nation's entanglement with the histories of colonialism and capitalism most notably by lauding liberal freedom over the internal incoherence of invocations of "natural law" (5). Though the US claims a "complex emancipatory image... as its birthright, its natural law" so, too, the "natural law" of property forms the basis of the US constitution (Berlant 78, Banner 96). Here, the "natural" masquerade of "liberal values amends the sanctioned violence of the nation-state and its interests" and, according to Chandran Reddy, is a "freedom upon which racial, patriarchal, capitalist, and slave-holding rights of enjoyment are predicated" (13, 20). In this way, theorists cite a

dissonance in national narrative that is acutely embodied in the protagonist of American allegory who, rather than riven with anxiety from an internal battle between his shared birthright of freedom and his right to a unequal system of capital accumulation, is instead universalized over those who do not experience the same privilege. Just as “Land owning,” in the words of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “is the nationalism of America,” the paradigmatic land-owning citizen-hero is *naturally* a white male King (129). Nature is a cipher in the shifting shape of American liberalism—where freedom *through* violence—its criminality, deception, and theft—is magically transformed into a freedom *from* it through the “natural” mask of liberal universalism. This transfiguration of the “natural” is necessary to American Adam’s heroism, a protagonistic sovereignty constituted in claims that it is naturally *bestowed* by the act of *taking* what does not belong him.

The appeals to “nature” that constitute the universal sovereignty of American Adam both index and erase the contradictions inherent to liberalism. “Nature” signifies the innocent, utopian commoning of American national allegory where the “who, what, and where” of the American commons mask the “how.” Upon close inspection, the American social contract of liberal market capitalism begins to look less idealistic and more like a dystopian humbug, where the liberal politic of universality makes common the criminality of the American nation-state through a swift but enduring hoax. American national allegory, in its most politically reflective mode, instead allegorizes Amy Reading’s study of *The Mark Inside*: “America was, since its inception, a confidence trick” (26). Under the American Adam mask of a utopian universalism lurks the thievery of white settler colonial possession. In *Blithedale Romance*, this darkly disguised masquerade is what Reddy terms “the violence of utopian reform” (58). Only five years

later, Herman Melville depicts this masquerade as an even darker, dystopic, and devilish ruse linking the violence of whiteness to the liberatory lies of liberalism.

### **Melville's *Confidence Man* and Liberalism's Devil's Lane**

Melville's 1857 *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* sets this 1850s crisis of legitimization on a steamboat traveling down the Mississippi river from St. Louis to New Orleans. The novel follows a sinister shapeshifter who assumes various forms of the con man, a type of criminal who came to national consciousness in 1849 (Cheyfitz 241). Most critical interpretations of the novel have read the shifty titular character in some measure of relation to the "conventions of the devil allegory" that effect a "transcendent critique of the market economy" and find the book as a whole an "indictment of American optimism" (Parker and Niemeyer xii, Dimock 186, Spanos 168).<sup>124</sup> Additionally, many critics have read the novel in terms of its individual and immaterial allegories—the real people signified by particular characters or the novel as a parody of the de-realization of capital in the era's "epidemic of counterfeit" and proliferation of debt structures (Banner 30). However, attention to what Joanne Barker calls "territory as analytic" suggests the novel critiques not just market culture or American ideology but places the material realities of the 1850s in a longer history haunting the American commons with a whiteness that persists in much imagination of the American public lands today. Its

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<sup>124</sup> In 1981, Mary K. Madison tracked 101 critics between 1922 and 1980 for how they identified the title character: "16 regard him as unknowable or ambiguous," "16 as the Devil, 2 as Christ, 4 as God, 4 as a trickster god, 6 as both God and the Devil, 10 as a man; 24 do not discuss the matter; and 19 see him in some other way—for example, as 'Salesman par excellence,' 'partly conman and partly philanthropist,' 'Everyman,' 'an artist,' 'Mercury, or at least a shape-shifting, Mercurial word-deceiver.' Madison pointed out that while two of the three published annotated editions of *The Confidence-Man*, Foster's (1954) and Parker's (1971), support the Devil identification, only 15 of the 85 critics writing since Shroeder's 1951 article have agreed" (Branch et. al. Edited by North342). However, in recent criticism, the trend seems to focus more on Melville's critique of capitalism and Christianity without too much regard for what the main character strictly represents.

preface, its temporal and territorial settings, its main character and his disguises, and the central fulcrum of the novel all testify to the white possession of settler colonial allegory.

When read for the territory traversed in the novel, *The Confidence Man* immediately suggests an allegory for liberalism's racialized ruse that both precedes and is imperative to apprehending the criminality of the newly continental-wide American nation. The novel's prefatory dedication honors the victims of the Auto de Fé, the ritual of public penance of condemned heretics and apostates during the Spanish and Portuguese inquisition. Prefacing thus, the novel inaugurates its narrative arc with a paean to the victims of the first wave of settler colonialism's ritualized violences. It thus establishes itself as a commentary on the long history of nation-making, allegorizing a transnational phenomenon and suggesting the particular history of the American nation state must be understood within the context of the international colonization of the continent. The novel settles the commons of America within the theologically driven tyranny of early colonization, making clear that whatever religious commentary critics identify in the novel cannot be separated from their criminal colonial context.

That colonial history frames the narrative's opening, which follows the preface's invocation of ceremonial killing with the harmless ritual of pranks. The novel opens "At sunrise on a first of April," setting the narrative in the ethereal dawn of any and no particular day of practical jokes which, given the preface's dark introduction, becomes a morose mimicry of what Benedict Anderson calls the conjuring trick-like character of post 1850s imperialist ideology (Melville 9, Anderson 111). As William Spanos shows, "the historical time and geographical space in which the action of the novel occurs are intended to foreground the entire history of America or, rather, of the formation of the



optimistic American national identity” (178). This magic move from deadly to harmless deception allegorizes the ways that “America was, from its inception, a confidence trick,” mimicking the erasure of the protracted violences of settler time through some humbug of optimism (Reading 26). The invocation of April fools day launches an American allegory that is at once murderous and innocent, the paradox commoning the settler state.

Ultimately, the novel’s allegory suggests that the American commons is best perceived through a personification of the parlance of the 1850s: the Devil’s Lane. As a colloquialism, it refers to plots of land that were disputed over by American settlers, typically neighbors who, each believing the land to be theirs, erected spite-fences that left a contested place between the two boundary markers. The Devil’s Lane signifies a liminal place where travelers could pass that was at once both and neither public and private property (*Loaded* 107).<sup>125</sup> This not-quite-private, not-quite-public plot is the space traversed by *The Confidence Man*. Its metamorphosing main character deceives the “public” on the ship but continually claims innocence by troubling what criminality, deception, and confidence really mean. This space forged in disputes between settlers, a plot where little is mentioned of the racialized violences of American empire or the paradoxes of property plaguing national identity. Instead, the general atmosphere on the ship suggests that almost every single person could be a criminal but each recognizes that they constitute the social life of the commons through a confidence in each other. They both make up and are trapped in devil’s lane—where disputes over settler property, or white possession, mask the thievery naturalized in the counterfeit American commons.

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<sup>125</sup> In invoking this concept, Dunbar-Ortiz cites a *New Yorker* article by Bobby Ann Mason, listed here in the citations. The term also appears in *The Dictionary of American Regional English* though the definition lacks the cultural nuance of Mason and Dunbar-Ortiz’s usage.

The novel's story arc traverses this complex geography of the country's racialized "progress," tracing the con man from the Gateway to the West to New Orleans. As it begins in St Louis, a place just as significantly known for being the realm of the Mound Builders whose genealogical relation to "modern Indians" was in 1850, as still now, debated, the novel embarks at the mythic porthole to "free land" marked by Indigenous presence to this day. In contrast, the journey to New Orleans, the city with the largest slave market *and* largest free persons of color population, follows the most significant trade route for property and persons to a city where the disputed definitions of "person" and "property" were as ubiquitous as the water (Stanton 97). *The Confidence Man* travels across an American commons whose "commons" is a con that extends beyond an anecdotal treatise on Christian hypocrisy, American optimism, and the market economy alone. Instead, *The Confidence Man* literalizes the deception of incorporation as a mask that maintains white innocence and covers the violent contestations of property-making underwriting the American nation.<sup>126</sup> The many masquerades performed by the main character cohere in a criminality common to American national identity—the almost transcendental whiteness masquerading as liberal universalism. As an internally consistent national allegory, the masquerade of liberalism's white possession shifts in appearance, but not substance. Just as property changes from being a thing to being a bundle of rights over a thing, and as national territory enlarges to include many newly incorporated citizens, liberalism's universal citizen-subject remains a property holding white male (Luck 10).

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<sup>126</sup> William Spanos sees the novel as a decisive and "devastating parody of American optimism" which lambasts the essential characteristic of American identity as an "American Adamic confidence" in American exceptionalism (168, 171).

The novel's setting on the Mississippi river further suggests the allegory as particular to the transit and transitory-ness of the settler commons. Traveling as it does down the Mississippi, the novel traces one of, if not the, most important geographical line in American national identity. Not only did the Mississippi mark the boundary between eastern inherited aristocracy and the risky western promise of self-making that land and/or gold could offer (Cheyfitz 233). The Mississippi river was also the east-west line of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and removal of Native nations, according to Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, and the north-south corridor of the slave trade (*Loaded* 30). It was thus the boundary between what was and was not the U.S. as well as the liminal space where human became property.

The novel is surrounded by the boundaries of, and thus defined by, the irresolution of what, who, and where is common to the U.S. nation state. The Mississippi was, more figuratively, the paradigmatic representation of, a "settler nation's internal opening to difference" that, in Stephanie LeMenager's words, characterized the Mississippi valley as "a seat of anarchic violence that threatens national consolidation" with a river culture that made "plain that nature does not necessarily complement the emigration of white Americans into western lands that do not belong to them" (*Manifest* 1, 156, 195). Dedicated to the first victims of the same religious fervor that justified the Doctrine of Discovery, and set within the space of settler colonialism's unfinished project marked by market capitalism's anxious transit along the boundary between the human and property, the common space of *The Confidence Man* is nothing more than the shifting, transitory, and thieving criminality of U.S. settler colonial property-making. The "commons" of American national identity, as the *Confidence Man* tells it, is the Big Con.

*The Confidence Man* goes further to make even more literal the con of the national commons. Its action occurs on the decks of the steamboat *Fidèle*, a common space of “faith” standing in for market capitalism’s relentless regulation of the boundaries between public and private property. The steamboat is the single most important signifier of the 1850 shift into suicidal modernity, a change made possible by “steam-driven capitalism” (Hensley). Moreover, the steamboat was, as James Ely’s legal history of property rights shows, the impetus for establishing the boundaries of property regulation in the first commerce clause to reach the Supreme Court (72). In 1824, *Gibbons v Ogden* broke up steamboat monopolies and authorized Congress to “regulate Commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with Indian tribes” (qtd in Ely 72). The ruling thus maintained interstate transport free of state trusts, a ruling necessary to forge national markets as well as the railroad system—a system that included thirty percent of tracks that did not go anywhere, as Amy Reading’s chronicle of 1850s confidence men reminds (144). The commerce clause was a ruling that an early twentieth-century history of the Supreme Court referred to as the “the emancipation proclamation of American commerce” (qtd. in Ely 73). Steamboats were the means of staking claims in a contested commons—making the property, fungible and homesteaded, crucial to American national faith in *Laissez faire* capitalism.

In this way, steamboats were a “microcosm of America,” encapsulating national anxieties over the rise of capitalism’s monopoly markets, its speculative deceptions, and the ethics of territorial and commercial boundaries between America and “Indian tribes” (Mitchell 52). Indeed, the steamboat journey of the novel traverses the route that brought the enslaved to market and the most significant river traversed by Native peoples during

removal—a river where less than twenty years before the novel’s publication saw the drowning of at least 400 Creeks in the sinking of the steamboat *Monmouth*.<sup>127</sup>

Responding to the horror of the incident, the editor of the *Niles National Register* warned, “If retributive justice is meted out to nations as to individuals, what a fearful reckoning is in reserve for this nation” (qtd in Meares 10). The owner of the *Monmouth* received no punishment, though the accident suggested more than just individual responsibility in the yet-to-be fully regulated transport of commerce. This suggests the steamboat as a complex symbol for the commoning of American capitalism.

As allegory, the novel’s steamboat setting suggests the commons as the devil’s lane—the not-quite public or private space defined by who and what controls property. This, by virtue of naming, is a matter of faith in both kinds of trust—the corporate cartel and the invisible hand of the national market. The novel thus defines the where of the American “commons” as the liminal, contested space of the settler state that, as if by magic, faithfully floats over the victims of its property-making violences. According to the allegory of the novel, the *when* of the American commons begins with the victims of ritualized colonial violence, a debt erased in the seemingly mundane ritual of innocence-making epitomized by April Fools’ Day hoaxes. The *where* of the American commons is confined to a space of faith—drifting through the contested space of the free-market floating on the hoax of private property. This faith floats along the symbolic east-west boundary of genocide and removal as well as the north-south route where transits

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<sup>127</sup> In October of 1837, the steamboat *Monmouth* sank in the Mississippi river and “Some reports said 240, others about 360, while yet another report put the drowned at more than 400. The most commonly quoted estimate, 311 Indians drowned, comes from the book *Indian Removal*, by Grant Foreman” (Meares).

definitions of the human and the non, the free and the unfree. It is a faith buoyed by the confidence game of fair and equal access.

Entering into this allegorical *mis en scene* is the titular figure, a shapeshifter who embodies the antebellum era episteme which saw the confidence man as a “manifestation of the very devil himself,” secularizing it to represent the whole *who* of the American commons (Reading 240). If we recall that, according to Jameson, the national allegory regards the individual story and the individual experience as one that “cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself,” then the devil is indeed in the details—the details of each persona the confidence man assumes together suggest the myth of American national identity. The main character’s sly shifts from one figure to the next indeed suggest, as many theorists and historians have shown, that both the uniquely American figures of the self-made man and the confidence man are conceptually identical.

Though Melville was well acquainted with the criminality of real-life confidence men, as Michael Reynolds’ research reveals, the historical moment that the novel was written in would have made it undeniable to not see that the American mythos of self-made men were merely “Con men [who] worked firmly within the structures of American democratic capitalism, exploiting uncharted territory inside the system itself” (Reading 27). Amy Reading’s research, stunningly storied in *The Mark Inside*, reminds readers just how close the confidence men of the 1850s were to the likes of Ben Franklin, both “self-made men who found opportunity in the undefined crevices between social classes.”<sup>128</sup> Both exhibited the “self-reliant individualism” that were virtually

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<sup>128</sup> Rick Mitchell asserts that Melville does seem to be parodying the writing of Ben Franklin at times, a parody that I understand in terms of a broader allegorical function (58). Not only were “the wealthiest

indistinguishable save for the politesse that supposedly granted its bearer a “natural power” to rule over the masses and be deemed a hero rather than a criminal (Reading 28, 29). The distinction between criminal and capitalist, con-man and self-made, is easily distilled into the racial inequalities codified into American national identity in the 1850s.

The inequalities intrinsic to the US settler state were intimate to Melville, codified as rule of law not only at the time when *The Confidence Man* was written but also by Melville’s own father-in-law. The father of Melville’s wife, Massachusetts chief justice Lemuel Shaw, oversaw the codification of the contract theory of possessive individualism, a political philosophy that C.B. Macpherson famously traced to the social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke “in which the individual is the proprietor of his or her own capacities and the law exists to preserve his freedom to exchange them” (Reading 241).<sup>129</sup> As Reading tells it, “in the age of Lemuel Shaw and Melville’s *The Confidence Man*, the law enshrined the individual as an entrepreneur of himself, personhood as something fungible, the self as capital” (241-242). This possessive individual indexes, according to Wai Chi Dimock’s reading of *The Confidence Man*, the “absolute congruence” of the “imperialist structure of selfhood in Manifest Destiny” and the capitalist structure of selfhood expressed in “the freedom of opportunity and mobility” (201). Critics like Dimock note in their reading of the novel that the freedom of possessive individualism was “already, in its very conceptualization, a discriminatory

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colonists all speculators,” marking the relationship between “self-made” figures of American popular sovereignty like Ben Franklin and land theft, but those speculators were often con men like Daniel Boone, who intruded “on sovereign Native land so as to covertly survey it and sell it to white settlers, who would then form themselves into militias to murder families who had been living there for generations” (Dunbar-Ortiz 34, 100). In the summative words of Amy Reading, “Westward expansion happened because of counterfeit” (40).

<sup>129</sup> Reading also points out that the solidification of contract theory happened under the direction of Massachusetts chief justice Lemuel Shaw, Melville’s father-in-law (241).

category, embedded in a structure that requires deserving victims” (Dimock 201). Following these scholars, we better see the shapeshifting of the novel’s main character to mimic the self-made man, but neither emerge *ex nihilo*. Rather, they were made possible by slave trading, land speculation, and the plantation economy—a form of “pastoral Christian origins of model racial governmentality” that is often analogous to the commons (Feldman and Medovoi 1). In the concise language of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, the self-made man was “the vaunted ideal of white supremacy” (*Indigenous Peoples* 169). Possessive individualism, in other words, is the contractual mask behind which white possession lurks.<sup>130</sup> *The Confidence man* corporealizes this white possessive masquerade.

As the self-made/confidence-man with property in his own person, the main character’s devilishness is more accurately understood as a literal embodiment of this incorporation—the “twisted genius” of white American identity made flesh (Dyson 22). Robin DiAngelo, riffing on Charles Baudelaire, notes: both the devil and whiteness share “a category of identity that is most useful when its very existence is denied” (52). Instead of rejecting the existence of the “white-devil,” *The Confidence Man* displays it, offering readers a confrontation with the white possessive metaphoric core of American national identity: “The Devil. Racism. Another metaphor. Same difference” (Dyson 22). What Stephanie LeMenager calls the heaviness of whiteness in Melville weighs down the

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<sup>130</sup> We can arrive at this conclusion, too, by staging a conversation between C.B. Macpherson’s formative study of these theories of ownership as they originate with the foundational thinkers of liberalism’s social contract, coupled with Chandran Reddy’s *Freedom With Violence* which reminds us that settler colonialism “advanced individual rights as a way to restore claims of universality to contain anti colonial struggles,” and George Lipsitz’ possessive investment in whiteness which shows whiteness is a social construct coextensive with property rights (Reddy 21). Together with Brenda Bhandar’s work on the legal *Colonial Lives of Property*, this exchange reminds us that while modern contract law was “born staunchly proclaiming that all men are equal,” the subtext of such a proclamation was that “all men” equaled the magic equivocation of whiteness and property (Horowitz 161).



confidence man's fungibility, his "all things to all people," his universality (LeMenager 161). He is, instead, metonymic for the invisibility of whiteness and its determinism for the interchangeability of property—representing the conjunction between "the legal form of property ownership and the modern racial subject" in the singular figure of the white possessive person (Bhandar 5). The novel shows the blurred line between white supremacist and outlaw hero that Lauren Berlant calls the "vanishing point in a narrative that leads from criminal to national times," masked as it is in liberalism's universalizing discourse of human nature (Berlant 193). Indeed, the *who* of national subjects—from the progressive social reform associated with the novel's transcendentalist characters such as Winsome's allegorical Ralph Emerson to the racial regimes expounded on by the Indian-hater par-excellence, a figure "exemplary in not being exemplary" though extrapolated from the real James Hall — is underwritten by the supposedly "naturalness" of the social contract (Moran 133). The novel narrates this masquerade of social contract's supposedly universality and shows it to hinge on, like the novel itself, the genocide of Native peoples.

As most critics have noted, the two halves of the book turn on Chapter 26, titled "Containing the Metaphysics of Indian Hating, According to the Views of One Evidently Not so Prepossessed as Rousseau in Favor of the Savages." Most agree on the significance of the chapter for marking a shift from the confidence man asking for confidence from others prior to this chapter to his giving confidence for the rest of the novel (Spanos 180, Crumbo 208). Instead, Laura Mielke argues for a consistency across the novel that highlights that the "Indian-lover and the Indian-hater alike dehumanize American Indians" (13). However, almost no scholarship has commented on the

significance of the social contract of which Rousseau is representative, nor its relationship to the *metaphysical* operation of Indian-hating. We must attend to the metaphysical as political, so as not to be doomed to repeat it.

The chapter offers the story of the backwoodsman's Indian-hating as a synecdoche for the ways that discourses of nature naturalize settler violence. Its title clearly ties the metaphysical persistence of Indian-hating to the more brutal theories of the social contract found in Hobbes and Locke through its refusal of Rousseauian noble savagery. It goes on to tell a story of a story being told, a classic obfuscation of responsibility (similar to today's "asking for a friend"). The chapter begins this twice-removed story thusly: "The judge always began in these words: 'The backwoodsman's hatred of the Indian has been a topic for some remark'" (149). This opening universalizes the tale as "always began" and one of an enduring type, "the backwoodsman." It establishes the tale as so long-remarked upon as to be almost fact, the truth of which inevitably concludes, as the opening paragraph does, in the settler colonial imperative that Indians "must be executed" (149).

The teller goes on to explain the backwoodsman as a lonely "self-willed," self-reliant man who, as the paradigm of a self-made man,

thinks that nature destines such sagacity as she has given him, as she destines it to the 'possum... if the 'possum's betray it to the trap, or the backwoodsman's misled him into an ambush, there are consequences to be undergone, but no self-blame. As with the 'possum, instincts prevail with the backwoodsman over precepts. (149-50)

Not only does "nature" ally the backwoodsman with the 'possum, it acquits them both while underwriting the "instinct" that guides all the Indian-hater's actions. This instinct is attributed to, on the very next page, not the lessons of his schoolmasters but rather a kind

of inherited “history” of “Indian lying, Indian theft, Indian double-dealing, Indian fraud and perfidy, Indian want of confidence” that seems more reminiscent of the Leatherstocking tales than a fact-based narrative (151). Yet, as the story concludes, we learn the Indian-hater was so skilled in his extermination campaign that he rose through the army ranks to become a colonel.<sup>131</sup> This story—told by a man who is smoking a “calumet,” an Indian peace-pipe, according to the footnotes, and told to the very character who the reader has witnessed perpetrating all of the above crimes—cannot escape the gravity of its spiraling irony. The anecdote shows claims of “nature” used to solidify story as historical fact, and that “history” of Indian criminality, the originary logic justifying much U.S. military strategy, concludes in an erasure of the factual brutality of history: “The career of the Indian-hater *par excellence* has the impenetrability of the fate of a lost steamer. Doubtless, events, terrible ones, have happened, must have happened; but the powers that be in nature have taken order that they shall never become news” (156). Here, as in the ‘possum analogy, “nature” functions as the metaphysical magic erasing any news of Indian lives lost, just as the drowned Creeks on the Mississippi were never really counted as anything more than as lost to “nature” as the Monmouth steamer.

The big con of the self-made confidence man codifies the devil’s lane of white possession as the shared center of the settler commons. This con covers the genocidal violence at the core of settler capitalism—and parodies the metaphysical innocence-making repeated in scholarship that dismisses the novel’s density as inscrutability.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The story continues that his prejudice was so great as to limit his military career to colonel, implying that the higher up in the chain of command, U.S. military tactics become more savvy and perhaps counterinsurgent.

<sup>132</sup> Wai Chi Dimock refers to the novel’s “peculiar opaqueness, in which the author appears as both inscrutable and irresponsible” (206). While I do not seek to contradict, I wish to suggest that claims suggesting that the novel is impassable—of which this is but one—continue a certain liberal version of the

Uncovering the consistency of national allegory within *The Confidence Man* allows us to identify the entire political spectrum shared by the genocidal, “parasitical nature of white freedom” which grounds the settler commons—be they on land or river (Morrison 57). Moreover, establishing Indian-hating as the fulcrum for the shifting nature of settler colonialism - at a time when the territorial boundaries of the nation state itself had shifted – the novel allows us to see those metaphysics as they transcend national borders. The novel allegorizes the “big con” of American national narrative as a ruse of “confidence in nature,” where the settler colonial commoning under the guise of liberal incorporation is nothing more than a cover for the white possession underwriting settler colonial capitalism.

In contrast to *The Confidence Man*’s portrayal of the shapeshifting metaphysics of “confidence in nature” that fences liberalism’s devil’s lane, *The Life and Times of Joaquín Murieta* makes unflinchingly *unnatural* the accretive and spectacular violences of racial formation masquerading as legal, natural, and continental incorporation into the U.S. settler state. John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee) published *Joaquín Murieta* in 1854, offering U.S. audiences not just the first novel written by a Native author but a mythic tale of spectacular violence that literalizes the ruse of the property/nature/mobility assemblage underwriting the ongoing operations of settler capitalism.

### **Rollin Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta*: Denaturing White Possession**

*The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* is a dime novel depiction of a wronged figure, part fiction, part amalgam of many real people. The novel, drawn in part from newspaper accounts that asserted “Every murder and robbery in the country [was]

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metaphysics of Indian-hating. The novel is dense and confusing, yes, it is *not* indecipherable, as its most material and transparent point—the metaphysics of Indian-hating—makes clear.

attributed to ‘Joaquin’,” tells of a single Murieta, an innocent Spanish noble turned brutal criminal who gathered a large band of outlaws and terrorized Californians for two years, stealing cattle, robbing, kidnapping, and murdering, and who is ultimately captured and beheaded (qtd. in Jackson xxvi). The supposed head of Joaquin Murieta was paraded as proof of his death, though the novel’s narrative subtly suggests, like the San Francisco *Alta* article from August 23, 1853, that the spectacle of Murieta’s head on a post is a transparent “humbug” (qtd. in Jackson xxv). In its tour of the national, economic, and legal brutalities of newly stated California in the years just after the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the novel is also the story of a swindle that stretches beyond the realm of fiction.

The tale traces the titular character as he follows the gold rush into California from Sonora, where he lived as a Mexican elite with an “enthusiastic admiration of the American character” (8). In the opening pages, the novel details Murieta’s eager pastoralism as a miner, a farmer, and a homesteader who, very soon after coming to California, is beaten, tied up, and forced to watch as his wife is raped “by lawless and desperate men, who bore the name Americans” (9). Murieta and his wife are then driven from their second farm by “unprincipled Americans” who use the excuse that he was “an infernal Mexican intruder” to explain their envy-fueled violence (10). Just a few sentences later, Murieta is stopped by a mob that accuses him of riding a stolen horse. The mob ties him to a tree, whips him, and proceeds to hang his half-brother. In the unrelenting brutality of the novel’s opening, Murieta’s faith in “fair and honest work” is transformed (11). He declares “he would live henceforth for revenge and that his path should be marked with blood” and soon “Report after report came into the villages that

Americans had been found dead on the highways, having been either shot or stabbed, and its was invariably discovered, for many weeks, that the murdered men belonged to the mob who publicly whipped Joaquín” (12-13). The novel begins thusly, with a noble man performing every signifier of American identity in a newly American California, only to be racially marked and refused the respect of citizenship that the Treaty supposedly guaranteed. Murieta’s conversion from nobleman to criminal moves him from his optimistic performance of American ideals into a revenge-plot marked by “a hatred to the whole American race” (14). Regarding this transformation, the narrator asks the reader, “Thus far, who can blame him?” (13). This question frames the story of the legendary bandit and his band who were emblematic of a pervasive ethos of the time that equated patriotism “with outlawry” (Jackson xvii).

Where *The Confidence Man* exposes the slippery shapeshifting con game of the American commons, *Joaquin Murieta* suggests that the American commons is not a bordered phenomenon but rather a commons that relies on the racialized ruse of white possession that transcends the shifting boundaries of the settler state. The novel both reveals this white possessive commons to transcend borders and suggests a different sort of commons emerging out of the unstable spaces of the settler state.<sup>133</sup> Where *The Confidence Man* narrates the commons as the devil’s lane, the contested space of the settler state’s white possession and its fraudulent universalism, *Murieta* suggests a third space between criminal and citizen, between the “naturalness” of white possession as the nation and the self, a third space in the spaces unmade by settler state-making. The

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<sup>133</sup> This exploration of the type of commons produced in *Joaquín Murieta*’s national allegory will not adventure among the adroit discussions of Ridge’s complicated family history, their role in Cherokee removal, and Ridge’s personal “advocacy of liberal individualism” and purported pro-capitalist politics, nor whether those biographical details constitute a “complex sublimation” in the novel (Rowe 102).

commons is not formed in the moment of California's ratification of the constitution, it is formed and reformed in every rape, murder, and theft that serve as the origin story for Joaquín Murieta's criminality in the novel and the origin history of the settler state in the US. Murieta thus stands as the victim of the violences that Karl Marx deemed "primitive accumulation," that, as Glen Coulthard shows, both predate the American nation but also endure as the ongoing structure of social relations in the nation-state.

Though offering critical commentary on the settler commons before and beyond the American nation-state, the novel's reception at the time of publication testifies to the purchase of the novel's allegorical accuracy, describing a problem of the commons so germane to its historical moment that its fiction was taken for truth. Much criticism has focused on the relationship between the novel and the historical facts, tracing the novel's relationship to Ridge's history as well as the real nineteenth century California criminal who featured prominently as the prime villain in newspaper articles at the time Ridge arrived in California. Shelley Street reviews the legend and literature up to the 1930s while Remi Nadeau's extended 1974 study on *The Real Joaquín Murieta* does much to trace the historical records of the real-life bandit. Both note that, despite the novel's identifiable dime store novel tropes, much of Ridge's account was assumed fact at the time of its publication. The novel's allegory of a transnational white possessive violence was thus unfortunately made to mimic the myths it summoned—the novel was serialized by the *California Police Gazette*, which, along with other newspaper reports asserted the supposedly real threat of this bandit, led to the deaths of many (racially marked) people under the auspices of catching Murieta (Nadeau 144). The fictional American commons that *Joaquín Murieta* exposes as fiction became historical fact. The novel, then, acts as a

double national allegory—the one found in its narration linking extraction economics to structural conditions of white possession and the other an allegory of how a book challenging the foundations of the white nation state was instead used as a license for racialized violence.

In its introductory paragraph, the novel establishes itself as allegory of the settler-colonial nation coming into historical being. Where *The Confidence Man* narrates the white possession's devilish shapeshifting, *Joaquín Murieta* presents a singular figure standing in for a racialized multiplicity: where “There were two Joaquíns, bearing the various surnames of Murieta, O’Comorenía, Valenzuela, Botellier, and Carillo—so that it was supposed there were no less than five sanguinary devils ranging the country at one and the same time” (7). The narrator continues, claiming in passive voice, “It is now fully ascertained that there were only two, whose proper names were Joaquín Murieta and Joaquín Valenzuela, the latter being nothing more than a distinguished subordinate to the first” (7). Out of many, one racial Other. Indeed, as a story about “a man as remarkable in the annals of crime as any of the renowned robbers of the Old or New World,” the narrator asserts, “his individual history is a part of the most valuable history of the State” (7). This phrasing of inextricability anticipates almost exactly Jameson’s genre-defining language that argues national allegory is “the telling of the individual story and the individual experience [which] cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (85). However, contra Jameson’s claim that would define this as “third world literature,” the collectivity of *Joaquín Murieta* is common to the contested colonial history of California. The story is framed in its very first paragraph as an attempt on the part of the narrator “to contribute my mite to those



materials out of which the early history of California shall one day be composed. The character of this truly wonderful man was nothing more than a natural production of the social and moral condition of the country in which he lived” (7). In this, the novel defines Joaquín as the representative figure of many people, all reduced to “nothing more than a natural production” of the national circumstances that surround them.<sup>134</sup> In allegorical terms, Murieta is the product of the country. His story is that of the shifting settler state.

Introducing the hero *as the State*, the novel defines the State not by borders but within the racialized boundaries of liberalism’s social contract. The novel begins in the metonymic space of this 1850s crisis of liberalism—in the first three pages, we see Joaquín enthusiastically participating in both the mining and farming lives so paradigmatic of U.S. citizenship, while his new status and performance is repeatedly shown to be nothing more than a masquerade that will not protect him from the sadistic and “unmanly cruelty and oppression” of white possession. The text links the “natural production” of this “wonderful man,” language of the natural endemic to the contract of possessive individualism, to the violent and shifting territorial economies of California.

As the story opens, Joaquín is a picture of “enthusiastic admiration of the American character” and sets out to prove himself in the patriarchal self-making liberalism found in Puritan work ethic and Jeffersonian yeomanry (8). He works first in a mine which, in the context of the 1850 Foreign Miner’s Tax, made it “virtually impossible for Latin Americans to mine in California” and Murieta is targeted as a racial Other and beaten by Americans who then rape his wife (Owens 37). Then, “the next we

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<sup>134</sup> Molly Crumpton Winter, for example, asserts that this opening line is testament to Ridge’s uncanny awareness that “he is living at a time when history is being ‘composed,’ and his recursive strategy is to insert an alternative narrative that coincides with and disrupts the official myth taking shape in the form of government documents” (261). While I agree with the cultural work of the novel, I wish to avoid any claims that conflate Ridge with the novel’s narrator.

hear of him, he is cultivating a little farm on the banks of a beautiful stream that watered a fertile valley, far out in the seclusion of the mountains” where he is promptly driven out by men who “coveted his little home, surrounded by its fertile tract of land, and drove him from it, with no other excuse than that he was ‘an infernal Mexican intruder!’” (10). Murieta attempts the two most important economies associated with the environmental ideals of settler capitalism—mining and farming—but unmasks the racialized violences underwriting the logics of private property.

If for Locke, the theory of private property and the social contract takes its origin in America, where “In the beginning, the whole world was America,” *Joaquín Murieta* locates America as coevolved with the racialized violences that naturalize a “country full of lawless and desperate men, who bore the name of Americans but failed to support the honor and dignity of that title” (9). Title, the signifier of the liberal status that property confers, is in unequivocal and moral contrast to the status of American citizen, an identity marked by the undiscerning “prejudice of color, the antipathy of races which . . . afforded them a convenient excuse for their unmanly cruelty and oppression” (8-9). The novel thus refuses the recognition associated with the Puritan work ethic and pastoralism, the early and enduring masks for the white possession of settler colonial capitalism, and denatures the “natural production of social and moral conditions” by detailing the sadistic social relations spurred by land theft. The national allegory of the novel is thus not limited to the United States, rather it takes on the entire system of settler colonial property making and racial formation. In these first pages, the novel links what it means to be American to the politics of racialized extraction economies as they extend well beyond the “publics” created by incorporation into the nation state.

The novel's introduction establishes the inextricability of the contradictory national rhetoric of incorporation that many critics have identified in the text with the gold rush extraction economies and the racial Othering underwriting the "Anglophilia" of which Emerson's 1856 *English Traits* is emblematic. Recent scholars like Molly Crumpton Winter read *Joaquin Murieta* as an allegory of the particular time and place of its setting in terms of a "culture-tectonic"—the "unexpected and often jarring encounters between different groups that mirror the geographical phenomena" that defines California (259). Winter argues for the allegorical nature of the novel's timeline, because "At the time when California was in the process of being classified an extension of the United States of America, Ridge's novel gave to a rumbling undercurrent of dissatisfaction at the ways in which articulated democratic ideals of state and nation were undermined exclusionary laws and practices. Ridge's novel begins the same year California ratifies its constitution, which presents to the world of a free and unified state" (259). Winter shows the novel interferes with "this official fiction" but still reads the novel as a testament to "jarring encounters" that amount to what Lori Merish calls the "subtle critique of white representations and textuality" (Winter 260, Merish 53). These readings, insightful as they are, fail to attend to the novel's allegorical capacity. More than a subtle or jarring critique of the exclusionary laws underwriting California's incorporation into the American national body, the novel shows this exclusion *is* the commons, where white violence is the spectacular, not subtle, not jarring, but constitutive foundation of the nation-state.

Gold fever defines more than just the historical moment of the novel, it is also the first extraction economy fueling colonization, signifying the precondition for capital

accumulation and the ongoing rapacity of its social relations. In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx and Engels write:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moment of primitive accumulation (823).

Identifying gold and silver mining, along with slavery and theft, as the “primitive accumulation” originating colonization’s capital production, the work of Glen Coulthard, Ned Blackhawk, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and Patrick Wolfe, among others, clarify Marx and Engels’ term through the *ongoing* dispossession of Native peoples where capital accumulation motivates the naturalization of Native peoples as inherently “primitive.” The novel likewise uses the particular moment of gold fever to indict what Chandran Reddy calls the “universalizing empiricist and transcendent subject” of settler colonialism as the agent of “death, torture, rape, starvation, and disease” (36). The novel crafts this gilded chain linking Columbus’ crazed search to the gold deposits discovered pre-removal on Cherokee lands to the constitution of California and its subsequent genocide of Indigenous populations (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous*, 129; Walker 115; Madley).<sup>135</sup> Gold glitters with all the promise of social mobility, the means of self-making, but in the novel, it telegraphs the brutality associated with white personhood, across nation-states and across time. Gold, and the irrational belief in its value “despite its relative uselessness in reality,” both indexes and mimics racial formation–fabrication with no reality but seemingly unlimited worth as the foundation for the liberal kingdom of white possession (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous*, 43). Just as John Rowe follows Shelley Street in drawing

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<sup>135</sup> See Medley.

attention to the ways “claims to both the mineral resources and productive land of California” motivated social binaries between foreigners and U.S. citizens, so, too, we see evidence of the enduring “ideology of whiteness” as a link between the history preceding, the context contemporary with, and the structural violence exceeding the novel’s setting (Rowe 99, Rifkin 33). In the novel, all that glitters is perhaps gold, but that shimmer reflects a blood-soaked history of primitive accumulation–resource extraction and racialized violence.

Rather than gilding the primitive accumulation necessary for the self-possessive citizen in the settler state, the novel throws into high relief the “ubiquitous lawlessness” of U.S. expansion. It repeatedly refuses what Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks* calls the colonial politics of recognition, most notably in troubling the “natural law” underwriting the secular morality of liberal universalism and ciphering the logic of white possession. The novel shows the “natural” as a “liberal form [that] promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racists, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (Coulthard 3). This refusal is epitomized in Joaquín’s “generous and noble nature,” or the “noble spirit which had been his original nature,” which foregrounds Joaquín’s increasingly brutal banditry based in social conditions that made “him by force of circumstances what nature never intended to make him” (8, 65, 12). Rather than the idea of natural nobility, which coded whiteness in the “nineteenth-century rage for races” as Nell Irvin Painter shows, the word for “noble” in Sanskrit, *arya*, “came to be applied to an imagined, superior race of Aryans” (196). Rejecting nature as a benevolent and moralizing force, the novel denaturalizes the coupling of nature and nobility in its multiplication—the one “nature” of

the natural law underwriting racial hierarchy is irreconcilable from the other “nature” as a code of honor. Instead of the “natural law” of social contract, a politics of recognition that naturalizes racial hierarchies of the settler state, the laws of nature in the novel are at times the code of honor for the characters and other times seemingly indifferent to human interests. John Rowe follows Shelley Street in drawing attention to the ways “claims to both the mineral resources and productive land of California” motivated social binaries between foreigners and U.S. citizens, so, too, we see evidence of the enduring “ideology of whiteness” as a link between the history preceding, the context contemporary with, and the structural violence exceeding the novel’s setting (Rowe 99, Rifkin 33). Gold glitters with all the promise of social mobility, the means of self-making, but in the novel, it telegraphs the brutality associated with white personhood, across nation-states and across time.

Even today, the novel’s refusal to naturalize racial logics and ideas of the “natural,” continues to cause critical disagreement that testifies to the insidious tenacity of racial categories. Much of the critical disagreement focuses on the novel’s treatment of the Native peoples called “Diggers, a derogatory term referring to their hunting-and-gathering societies and homophonically linked with the racist epithet for African Americans” (Rowe 99).<sup>136</sup> Working through the California archives of her own ancestry

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<sup>136</sup> John Rowe reads the diggers as indicative of Ridge’s “otherwise inexplicable prejudices toward other ethnic minorities in the novel” (113). However, Cheryl Walker reads the same evidence as portraying its most consistently and negatively racialized groups, the Chinese and the Diggers, as “fundamentally nonaggressive” (131). This seeming irreconcilability is also read, as Jordan Tracey’s work on the novel’s “Vindication of Cherokee Nature” does, as an intentional irony upheld throughout the novel. While Tracey concludes that the novel as a whole, “turns American racist judgment of the Diggers against the Americans themselves,” Tracey’s reading goes on to mount a defense of the Ridge family through the novel’s “Mount Shasta” poem (22). In that, the argument remains wedded to a conflation of nature-as-noble morality and a form of purity that does not address the ways the “nature” concept is used to depict California, “The Golden State,” as emblematic of the American environmental trope of wilderness sublimity coding Western sovereignty’s white possession. This is not to assert Ridge did not have complicated racial politics that

Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians* details how the people called "diggers" were the original peoples of California, and the most common Indians being held as slaves (47). "Diggers," Miranda tells readers, signified Native peoples who were enslaved, able to be killed without punishment, or "starved to death as their food resources were devoured by miners or trashed by gold mining techniques that reduced ecosystems to poisoned mud and rock" (Miranda 47). In keeping with the allegorical form, *Murieta*'s captivity by the Diggers should be read by the novel's own internal logic, as Mark Rifkin does, noting the ongoing contradistinction of racial categories from "American" symptomatic of the failure of U.S. governance (36).

Indeed, in *Joaquín Murieta* Cedric Robinson might find a paradigmatic "intrusion of convention" on the seemingly stable concept of race. Robinson writes, "Race presents all the appearance of stability. History, however, compromises this fixity. Race is mercurial - deadly and slick. And since race is presumed natural, the intrusion of convention shatters race's relationship to the natural world" (4). It recounts the "deadly and slick," brutal but indifferent, killing of individuals only referred to by their racial category save for the implied class of white Americans. Indeed, when *Murieta* is captured by the Diggers, he laughs and pronounces, "The biters were bit. The robbers were robbed," narrating not exactly the multicultural *Ruthless Democracy* of Timothy B. Powell's terms, but instead the unnatural grounds of democracy's ruthlessness - rather than a freedom from violence, the liberal settler state in fact offers what Chandran Reddy calls freedom *with* the violence, the violence of white possession. Read as an allegory of

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continue to mystify a stable reading of the novel. Rowe notes that Ridge did in fact argue for Native Californians to be removed onto reservations while Louis Owens, in similar denouncement of the novel's exhibition of Ridge's racism, notes that Ridge defended the Diggers in print (Rowe 110, Owens 39). It is, however, to say that the text itself is more ambivalent and slippery in its racial-morality equation than what is allowed for in most invocations of the author's own biases.

incorporation into the body of the settler state and its “natural law” of sovereignty and racial hierarchy, the novel severs liberalism’s (white) head.<sup>137</sup>

Ultimately, *Joaquín Murieta* rejects recognition in total, denaturing “the culturally validated whiteness equivalent to personhood” and citizenship via metonymy (LeMenager, “Floating Capital,” 415). Not only is Murieta consistently mis-identified or not identified at all, hiding in plain sight because of the proliferation of conjectures regarding what he looked like allows him the mask that anonymity affords. The constancy of his disguised identity directly follows his initial, clearly legible performance of whiteness. The introduction established that Murieta claimed his property rights under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, challenging “whiteness’ monopoly on US citizen status” that was legally expressed as California “regulated access to voting, testifying in court, sitting in juries, and serving in public office” (Drysdale 75, Rifkin 31). This initial performance amounted to a denial of the racial exclusion of the white possessive nation, but it immediately resulted in his and his family’s victimization. The novel traces Murieta’s increasingly terrorizing progress through the novel, marked by a narrator who is at first sympathetic, then perplexed, then dismayed of Murieta’s actions. Murieta embodies the increasingly torturous ways that “the United States’ frustration of Mexican land titles made questions of property ownership a particularly tortured subject” while also suggesting as Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks* shows, that primitive accumulation is *ongoing* (LeMenager, *Manifest*, 57). His subsequent violences are both a product and a reproduction of the settler state.

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<sup>137</sup> For more on the “Decapitated Body Politic” in the novel, see Alemán’s essay, which focuses on the relationship between Ridge’s life and the novel to assert that the novel tracks “what happens to the individual and collective racial body politic when they appeal to American ideology for social equality. They end up dispossessed, dismembered, and eventually decapitated” (71).



As the novel refuses the racist recognition conferred through the discourses of the “natural,” even in its most “noble” form, Murieta’s self-possessed villainy declines to make “proper” the tautology of property in Western sovereignty. Murieta’s increasingly bold, barbarous actions cross over from sympathetic to inexcusable—an impropriety that embodies the ways the “unconscionable becomes the exceptional becomes mainstream class rule,” to borrow China Miéville’s phrasing for the “everyday sadism” of our current moment. As an early example of Miéville’s critique, Murieta’s actions characterize him as both hero and villain, exposing the paradigmatic figuration of the self-reinforcing logic of property in the settler-state to be a ruse. Just as Locke theorized property out of land plus labor, where the ability to make property conferred the status of sovereignty, the property sum erased the violence necessary to make the component parts of his equation. This Lockean formulation of property is embedded in the tautology of Western sovereignty - where the sovereign is he who makes property, and the capacity to possess is what makes the sovereign. Murieta at once embodies this possessive individualism, as some critics have noted, and shatters the white possession proper to its property (Rifkin 47, Rowe 111). *Joaquín Murieta* both performs the violences associated with settler colonial land theft and refuses recognition of what Eric Cheyftiz calls the “proper, or literal” that translates people into static racialized populations without the capacity to possess (59). This propriety is a cipher for white possession that becomes the national naturalization of white possessive violence, what Byrd, et. al. refer to as “propriation” where the notion of the proper, the propriety of social order, and the making of property “have been neither chronologically distinct nor mutually exclusive” but work “in tandem with the production of colonial, racial, gender, and sexual categories” (5).<sup>138</sup> As Lori

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<sup>138</sup> Brenda Bhandar’s work builds on Cheryl I. Harris’s seminal essay that shows whiteness to be an

Merish notes, the novel “invokes the discourse of natural rights,” conceptually co-constitutive with Western sovereignty (50). Merish reads the novel as insisting on “the necessity of revolutionary insurrection against the injustices of positive law and the tyrannical authority of the ‘white republic’” as it references debates of the time over “the right to defend one’s person or property against the abuses of illegitimate power, a right commonly derived from John Locke’s theory that an individual who exercises unlawful power declared a state of war, thus nullifying the social contract” (50, 55). Merish concludes that Ridge universalizes the implications of racial injustice, though I would amend that conclusion to assert the *mode* by which that racial injustice is made proper–property.

The novel, in its refusal of the propriety, naturalization, and nobility associated with the colonial politics of recognition, reveals the tenacity of property that Miéville describes in our own moment: “Property itself is everyday sadism. To see it overthrown, even for a moment, is to know that joy exists, and to know that it is a material force.” While the novel ends with Joaquín’s head and Three-Fingered Jack’s hand on tour, a continuation of the spectacle of violence that Michel Foucault shows is imperative to all forms of sovereign power, it also hints that Joaquín may have *lived*, escaping yet again because no one is able to recognize him. That subtle, slippery overthrow of white possession’s hold is, as Miéville describes, a testament to joy and a force that continues to elude the cohesive reckoning associated with the settler commons.

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analogue to property, we find the “very fact of white privilege” was embedded “into the very definition of property, marking another stage into the evolution of the property interest in whiteness. Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites” (193).

*The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* is a transnational allegory for the everyday sadism of property-making commoning the settler state. Though the novel is a both a dime store western and romantic tall tale of an outlaw, it must also be understood as an allegory that exploits the contradictions implicit to the sovereignty of the settler state to reveal what kind of commons a national allegory is capable of building. Following Rifkin and Merish who each read the novel's genre as central to the ways the text challenges national boundaries, we must read *Joaquín Murieta* not as an tacit endorsement of a kind of Hobbesian state of nature, that is, of course, inseparable from notions of democratization and civilization (Drysdale 77). We must instead see it as a commentary on the capaciousness of national allegory—beyond first/third literary binaries—to comment on the liminality of the nation, of the settler state. *Joaquín Murieta* shows us that national allegory can naturalize the nation, via the proper, or it can question the criminality of white possession lurking under liberalism's mask. It can refuse incorporation into the settler commons and, as Mark Rifkin notes, serve as a testament to the “multiple publics on the land claimed by the U.S.” (44). National allegory can insist, quite violently, that we abide by Joanne Barker's “territory as analytic” to imagine a third space beyond the pales of Western sovereignty's incorporation into a supposedly universal, but unequally violent, allegory. Instead, the novel shows the form capable of theorizing a commons as a place where the excesses and contingency of American colonial rule are made legible.<sup>139</sup>

### **National Allegory Beyond the White Commons**

Hawthorne, Melville, and Ridge's stories help us think through the commoning power of national allegory—who and what are narrated into belonging to the nation—and

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<sup>139</sup>This is what Kevin Bruyneel calls a third space of sovereignty (xvii).

its relation to settler colonialism and the extractions of racial capitalism. We see Hawthorne's utopian-going-Native gone deadly, Melville's dystopic, shapeshifting devil's lane made metaphysical through Indian-hating, and Ridge's violent refusal of the proper-property of liberal freedom that conceals the bloody truths of colonial land theft. Through these three texts, national allegory emerges as a form capable of performing a confidence game that teaches. Its con can masquerade behind, or grow a capacity for recognizing, settler colonialism as the "everyday sadism" of property making. National allegory thus promises a form capacious enough to narrate both the gold-era violences of Spanish and American settler colonialism and the persistence of settler sadism in contemporary events like the "Gold-rush era land grab" in Bears Ears.

In other words, national allegory can help us identify the "ongoing, living, breathing eliminative anti-Indigenous violence continuously enacted by the settler colonial nation-state on Indigenous lands, nations and bodies versus it merely being a question of histories and legacies" (Kesīqnaeh). It can help us imagine a commons outside the law of the proper masking the spectacular violence of the sovereign, the commons common to what Moten calls "'the ownership society' that continues its brutal drive toward enclosing our common capacity and our capacity for the commons" (qtd in *Byrd et. al.* 13). In truth, as we see in Murieta's narrative, and scholars like Moten, Byrd, and others, the distinction of who is inside and who is outside the law is a difference whose porous-commonness is marked by the racial categories that make property proper to white possession.

Western sovereignty is *both*—its paradoxical status as both outside and inside the law is only proper to the propriety of white possession and its property. In point of fact,

its paradoxes are implicit to the tautology of property. National allegories that take up and exploit this incoherence show not just not the lie of sovereign autonomy but its *autoanonymity*, its self-contradiction.<sup>140</sup> Stories like this extend our imaginations of the commons beyond the “‘propriety and courtesy’ but also the ‘protection and safety’” that Wendy Brown reminds us is conjured in the notion of ‘beyond the pale’ (45). Indeed, they offer a commons beyond the pale of white possessive personhood, both the eugenicist version found in Carl Schmitt and the “softened version of it [as] it appears in social contract theory” (Brown 55). Instead, national allegories can point to a commons found in the ironic, active spaces constituted in relation, even to the incongruities, that acknowledge the commons in a settler colonial context as belonging to the first peoples of that place (Coulthard 12).

When taken to current discussions of the commons in debates over public lands, we are better able to assert this kind of third space, a commons constituted in a set of relations facing the history and present truths of settler space-making. Yet, this affirmation must go beyond acknowledgement. As current debates on public lands are increasing in veracity in the context of climate change, some declarations that claim the nation’s responsibility to secure rights to clean air and water challenge how the US nation state imagines its collective self carry, as they always have, life and death stakes. These three texts, when read as national allegories, teach us that the commons can be a verb—a place of consent, care, accountability, and reciprocity centered in the relational process of undoing the damage of settler property making, taking off the white masks modeled on possessive personhood, and refusing to naturalize any idea of nature that is bound up with

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<sup>140</sup> For more on the paradoxes of sovereignty, see Wendy Brown, especially pages 53-54.

commoning the settler state's sovereignty.<sup>141</sup> National allegory can narrate our commoning—our making common. It can tell the action of the commons as a verb.

These texts suggest, too, the power of public lands—not just the amnesia-making force of the Patagonia ad, but an excess beyond the enclosure into the atmospheres of settler capital's supposed “we.” This excess is leveraged in legal cases such as the Children's trust, a case based on the constitutional rights to life, liberty, and public trust resources.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the Patagonia ad potentially instigates inquiry into the ways national allegory can erase *or* build beyond the commoning of a settler environmentalist version of public lands, the settler commons. It asks us to revision, rewrite, and reimagine an advertisement that aids, not erases, a decolonial imagination in support of very particular publics.

My conclusion necessitates that I return to the Patagonia ad that began this chapter. In working through the implications of this analysis, I attempted a revision of the ad aimed at encouraging direct, decolonial action. My last try yielded: “The President Stole Land Again: The US settler state perpetrated yet another illegal theft of Indigenous lands. Follow these links for how to get involved in the return of these lands to their original protectors, the Utah Diné Bikéyah and the five Sovereign Tribes of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, and the Southern Paiute and Ute of what is currently referred to as Grand Escalante Staircase.” This rewrite, though much longer and without the punch of the original, attempted to amplify the models of decolonization already extant,

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<sup>141</sup> In conceiving of the commons as a verb, I follow Craig Fortier's work in *Unsettling the Commons*, who adds the concerns of social justice in the context of settler colonialism to prior formulations of the commons as a verb articulate by Peter Linebaugh and Sylvia Federici.

<sup>142</sup> This case also makes appeals to property, a level of complexity that also, as Priscilla Solis Ybarra reminded the Western Literature Association, draws on the Latin American precedent of a 1993 Philippines court case that was repeated in Uganda, Ukraine, and Portugal.

examples such as the recent return of ancestral lands by Colorado landowner Rich Snyder to the Ute Indian tribe of the Uintah and Ouray reservation (“Colorado”). When I shared this project at the Many Nations Longhouse in Eugene, an Inupiaq woman in the audience generously pointed out my own move-to-innocence in this revision. Given the particular public my reading of the ad assumes, the woman taught me, the rewrite should say: “WE stole land again.”

In this common space, I confront my own epistemological limits and my continued discomfort in sharing settler status with the politics I associate with the US settler state. In this unease, though, public lands perhaps offer what Kevin Bruyneel calls the third space of sovereignty: the place where the excesses and contingency of American colonial rule are made visible. In the space of my own failure made public, public lands present a spacious invitation to the practice of commoning, recognizing our shared—and uneven—places within settler colonial capitalism as well as our common desire for a public outside of that system.<sup>143</sup> As this kind of third space, a commons is constituted in a set of relations that regard the collective continuance of Indigenous peoples as the center of any discussion of public lands and the nation.

There, *here*, public lands can instead be enacted. They are performed by people like me in the practices of learning in public—acknowledging my deficiencies, revising, and aiming to do better. They are achieved in spaces of community accountability, of building our capacity and stamina, of the complicated work of creating and sustaining anti-racist and anti-colonialist environmental movements. They are the work, failures and all, of turning away from the commodity commons and toward the commoning of anticolonial community. Public lands are a verb.

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<sup>143</sup> Fortier, Federici, and Linebaugh’s “commons as practice” is vital to my understanding of public lands.

Today, there are many organizers, activists, and scholars who are committed to making this sort of commons more common. However, as we shall see, expanding what and who constitutes the commons is often met with fear. This scarcity mentality is on display in the Patagonia ad and often indicative of a type of apocalyptic thinking that the next chapter interrogates.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONTAINING NATURES:

#### THE AMERICAN APOCALYPSE AND ITS UNSETTLING EMERGENCIES

On October 27, 2016, Ammon Bundy and other members of the Citizens for Constitutional Freedom were acquitted of all charges stemming from their armed takeover of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. At Malheur, Bundy's frontier rhetoric marshaled anxieties about a federal government stealing land that rightfully belonged to them to declare the state-of-emergency conditions that justified their takeover.<sup>144</sup> On the very same day of the acquittal verdict, and with the visual drama of an apocalyptic dystopian film, a militarized police force arrested 141 water protectors in Standing Rock, North Dakota—an area ostensibly secured by the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, Lakota sovereignty, and the state of emergency that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council declared in August 2016 (Waánatan). The divergent consequences of these state of emergency events are marked by racial difference not limited to rural or reservation boundaries, but predictable across the history of the US settler-Native relations.<sup>145</sup> The disparities, too, find precedent in the literary genre most associated with the state of emergency: the apocalypse.

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<sup>144</sup> Bundy declared the suspension of US federal law, a proclamation analogous to a state of emergency. The status of "martial law" in the groups supporting the Bundy occupation is complex - many site that we are living in a time of undeclared martial law as evidence of why they must take up arms against the federal government. Members of the occupation declared they were no longer subject to US federal law, a proclamation akin to a state of emergency and familiar to the III%, Sovereign Citizens, Oath Keepers, Posse Comitatus, and other groups who came to the occupation's defense (though there is much slip between martial law, the state of emergency, and the status of these in terms of the federal government or the groups themselves making those declarations). For more on the militia movement and its relationship to the occupation, see Peter Walker's book *Sagebrush Collaboration* as well as the special report of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

<sup>145</sup> In response to the shock and rage that many expressed regarding the disparity between events at Malheur and Standing Rock. Kirby Brown reminded us that the outcomes are predictable because they are "structured into the legal and political fabric of dispossession, genocide, slavery, segregation, racism and labor exploitation through which the United States as we know it came to exist and continues to operate."

Tales of apocalypse marked both the Malheur occupation and the movements surrounding Standing Rock. Amplifying the apocalyptic habitus of the Malheur occupiers, groups like the III%, Sovereign Citizens, Oath Keepers, and Posse Comitatus joined the occupation's frontier-Western heroics to demand the return of the lands to their "rightful owners" in order to preserve freedom in the face of impending economic collapse and the apocalyptic threats of white genocide.<sup>146</sup> The Standing Rock Sioux leadership spoke of apocalypse in the Lakota Black Snake prophecy, telling of a time when a black snake would slither across the earth, poisoning water before destroying the world.<sup>147</sup> In response to the prophecy, Elders, water protectors, and their allies galvanized to defend their people and the other 18 million living downstream from both ongoing and future apocalypse, only most recently articulated as fossil fuel extraction (Whyte "The Dakota Access Pipeline," 155).

Yet, as Kyle Whyte so powerfully reminds us, these present and predicted future apocalypses must be understood as only the most recent in a longer history of settler colonial conquest, genocide, removal, and resource extraction which Indigenous peoples lived through, marking the present as something more like a post-apocalyptic dystopia ("Our Ancestor's Dystopian Now"). Whyte details history vital to understanding contemporary invocations of apocalypse, whether those be prophetic dog whistles for

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<sup>146</sup> For more on the relationship between apocalyptic literature, prophecy, and the Bundy occupation see Anson. Regarding the relevance of literary history to the Bundys, Dawn G. Marsh concludes, "Bundy's confused rhetoric is partly a refraction of spotty Christian theology, fringe militia movements and American mythology. Yet he is standing on solid ground in the imagined West in which his ideology resides," a West built in part by American literary tradition. Additionally, though the Bundy's avoided the term "white genocide," Keegan Hanks of the Southern Poverty Law Center uses Bundy's rhetoric to typify a primary tactic used by white nationalists. For more on the rhetoric of "freedom," see Walker 63.

<sup>147</sup> See Dallas Goldtooth on the Prophecy of the Black Snake and Paul's report for the *CBC*.

white genocide or appeals describing climate change and its attendant extinctions.<sup>148</sup> In the American context, the apocalypse genre is bound to an anthropocentric Western literary tradition born from the colonial, white supremacist, and capitalist systems that Whyte describes, systems historian Gerald Horne calls *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism*, and that Amitav Ghosh credits with the lead role in CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism's tragedy in *The Great Derangement*. As the genre revolves around the invocation of a state of emergency, it takes as its center a circumstance that has been used not only to instill fear in the name of motivating action, but also has been used to justify any number of aggressions in the name of national territorial and racial anxieties.<sup>149</sup> In that way, stories of American apocalypse have been and continue to be used to mask the uneven and apocalyptic realities of settler colonial capitalism responsible for historical, current, and anticipated future environmental injustices.

The way that the apocalyptic genre has functioned in the American context further predicts the divergent consequences of events at Malheur and Standing Rock. It also clarifies how contemporary apocalyptic narrations of environmental crisis can continue to

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<sup>148</sup> The weird weathers that once were the stuff of biblical apocalypse seem increasingly everyday, as we acknowledge our time as what Elizabeth Kolbert terms *The Sixth Extinction*. The annihilations that Kolbert's book describes adds specificity to mediascapes already exploding with environmental apocalypse narratives: Al Gore's 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* likens the extinction attending global warming to the asteroid event that wiped out the dinosaurs, claiming that "the apocalypse is us." The viral 2017 *New York* magazine article "The Uninhabitable Earth" introduces its doomed earth description with the image of a skull in sunglasses. The genre of environmental apocalypse fills mainstream film plots, news headlines, and think pieces. At the same time, all mentions of climate change have been removed from U.S. government websites and the *Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Robert F. Kennedy and Dick Russell's titular term for fossil fuel moguls) are increasing their speed, voracity, and creativity in extraction methods. In other words, the seeming ubiquity of environmental apocalypse stories today have not slowed or stopped the processes that they describe. Instead, they only seem to make what they narrate more real. The apocalypse, it seems, is self-reinforcing. But that is nothing new.

<sup>149</sup> The danger of such "clean slate" "state of emergency" or "emergency management" claims manifest in cities like Detroit. There, a state-appointed corporate Emergency Management regime engaged in a plan to strip voting rights, raid city pensions, and privatize water of minority residents. Response to Detroit water service shut-offs reminded city government that "Water is life and without it, we perish," an appeal that swells with the force of the Lakota words recited by water protectors: Mni Wiconi. (Collier and Ptashnik, "Residents.").

acquit racialized violence, land theft, and resource extraction, remaining dangerously wedded to the structures of power responsible for climate change. In much the same way as the armed occupiers of Malheur went unpunished, stories of environmental apocalypse can reinforce white innocence. However, as we saw with Standing Rock, they also can be used to mobilize masses to fight for climate justice, Indigenous decolonization, and visions beyond the end of the settler state. When we attend to the political work of the genre, we can clearly identify historical precedents for the fears of white genocide and frontier heroics at Malheur as well as the prophetic reach of Standing Rock. Turning to a historical moment equally marked by apocalyptic conflicts over sovereignty and its relation to territory, race, and history, this chapter augments Manjikian's claim that apocalyptic narratives "bring together two competing narratives about American identity—the narrative of American exceptionalism and the reality that it is not" (54). It asks how apocalypse can be used to structure different, and even competing, interpretations to historical circumstances and thus offer divergent implications for the future.

Delivered within weeks of one another, Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Pokagon's "Red Man's Rebuke" offer vital case studies for the ways that apocalyptic invocations can function as a tool of settler colonial hegemony or a means of imagining decolonial liberation. Turner's thesis, though not typically read through the lens of apocalypse, repeats the exceptionalism inherent to white settler colonial apocalypses.<sup>150</sup> Turner's frontier thesis sanitizes the violence of possession through an evolutionary apocalypticism, telling a (mythic) history that strengthens the national body through the modality of inoculation. In contrast, a

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<sup>150</sup> This chapter, as well as the larger project, understands whiteness as a category of being that shifts throughout history but remains a technology of settler colonial capitalism and Western sovereignty. See introduction for a more thorough explanation.

lesser-known speaker at the fair, Simon Pokagon, and his equally under-studied text, “Red Man’s Rebuke,” confronts the violence of possession by drawing on the religious tradition of the apocalypse genre to expose the US national body as terminally diseased. Pokagon uses the language of apocalypse in ways that suggest a radical apocalyptic genre exists in a structural critique of the settler state(s) of emergency and constitutes a state of emergence for antiracist environmentalism, narrative and otherwise. Where Turner posits myth as a new history, Pokagon exposes that history as myth. Together they highlight the deep political ties the genre has to territory, sovereignty, and whiteness - exemplifying the possibilities of the apocalypse genre to reinforce or upend the systems responsible for the past, ongoing, and future realities of the environmental-socialapocalypses. Ultimately, while the American apocalypse genre typically regards the unsettling end of a (white) world, it has the potential to diagnose the exceptionalism inhering in its history and instead imagine futures outside the environmental and racial violences that attend our changing climate.<sup>151</sup>

### **Turner’s Apocalyptic Thesis**

Turner’s apocalyptic tale is a paradigmatic case of the territorial and racial insecurity intrinsic to the white possessive logic of US settler sovereignty, and the ways that insecurity persists today in events like the Malheur occupation. Turner’s frontier thesis profoundly shaped American history curriculum, and persists in defining the frontier heroism in notions of individual sovereignty grounding the rhetoric of groups like

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<sup>151</sup> Here, “Unsettling” attempts to revise Lorenzo Veracini’s “Kill the Settler, Save The Man” argument, replacing the violence in Veracini’s formulation with a disquieting verb suggestive of land repatriation, following Tuck and Wang’s reminder that “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.”

the Sovereign Citizens.<sup>152</sup> The occupiers at Malheur repeat these Turner-ian logics. Turner himself said he was responding to the 1890 census that showed many dying rural populations across the United States (Cronon 364), a fear familiar to those occupiers' impassioned calls to fight for a rural, farm tending, god-loving way of life. However, though Turner's thesis is typically remembered for ushering in a new era of environmental history that noted the end of the frontier, it should be more specifically understood as the definitive text on the apocalyptic anxieties of his moment: the end of the world of "free" land. Most remember Turner's thesis for its opening - citing the census to show what he termed the closure of the frontier. However, even these scholars who critique the tropes cohering in Turner's new US history do not explicitly attend to the "new" threats his thesis was responding to, nor the ways he drew on apocalypse genre to condition the response. When read through the lens of apocalypse, his environmental history reveals its *fictions* - not least of which is that more land was "settled" after Turner declared the frontier closed than before (Limerick 23).<sup>153</sup> Turner's apocalyptic frontier fiction offers deep insight into the intimate relationship between the apocalyptic genre and the white possessive logics of American national identity,

In truth, the close relationship that apocalypse and American national identity share has as much to do with the genre's history in the rise of Christendom and its place

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<sup>152</sup> What Turner put forth as a "hypothesis" of US democracy had, and continues to have, factual and material corollaries. As a brief sampling of scholarly attestation to Turner's influence, William Katerberg notes, "Frontier mythology is a core element in American culture and the nation's self identity" (9). John Mack Faragher asserts, "Turner's essay is the single most influential piece of writing in the history of American history" (1). Similarly, Donald Worster proclaims, "Turner presides over western history like a Holy Ghost" (161). US national narratives continue to rely on the valence of Turner's tropes. Scholars like Henry Nash Smith have noted that US History courses followed Turner's thesis to such an extent that by the 1930s, it determined a majority off all history curriculum in the U.S., and remained prevalent into the 1980s (3).

<sup>153</sup> Patricia Limerick notes that at least half of the West remained federal land in 1890, but the fiction of land scarcity persisted despite the fact that more land was settled after 1893 than in anytime before (23).

in Western expansionism as it does with the fact that, in Spanos' words, "nations need enemies" (Spanos 178).<sup>154</sup> From the Greek word *apokalypsis* meaning "something uncovered," the genre of apocalypse narrates a revelation of the end of the world for a particular people. Not only does the apocalyptic narrative promise to divulge secrets not previously known, it also lays bare political investments informing its narrative arc. The genre is always expressive of a political aim, always "an invocation of power," whether that power is associated with dominance or revolution (McMurry 19). Specifically, apocalypse and the "mythology of Empire" are "very closely related" (Kermode 10). So close that, in the American context, apocalypse is a constitutive element of national identity.

Even the principle figure in the pervasively repeated national origin story was motivated by, and placed himself in, the apocalypse genre: Columbus believed he was fated to fulfill prophecies prior to the appearance of the Antichrist and imminent apocalypse.<sup>155</sup> Columbus's "discovery" was over-determined, and internally threatened, by his belief in imminent destruction promised by the apocalyptic arc. In his study "The Myth of Apocalypse and the American Literary Imagination." Lois Parkinson Zamora observes the American literary tradition portraying "America as the site of apocalypse of transformation from Old World to New" (108). Zamora repeats an oft-recognized truth

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<sup>154</sup> The history of apocalypse as genre is immanently tied to its religious roots in early biblical texts such as the books of Jeremiah, Exodus, and Revelation. Jeremiah is a prophecy of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, the possibility of averting the destruction with repentance, and the eventual restoration of the Israelites. Exodus is Israel's origin story of dispossession. Revelation details judgment day, the titular apocalypse, and holds a central space in Christian eschatology. For more on the history and difference between religious and secular strains of the genre, see Wojcik and Spanos.

<sup>155</sup> Columbus wrote, "Already I point out that for the execution of the journey to the Indies I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps. It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied" (111). Also see Collins and Young's "The Apocalypse of Colonialism" which links the colonial project to the theological locus of eschatology, citing Columbus as "one of the best exemplars of colonialism as apocalyptic mission" (147)

regarding the political valence of apocalypse's rebirth narrative in American national imaginary. He notes that America was conceptualized as a worldly Eden, supplanting the idea of a New Jerusalem with secularized Arcadian images of wilderness and forest (109). Zamora's work makes clear that the Jeremiad's Edenic Jerusalem and the New World's transformative apocalypse were (and are) a foundational part of national identity.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, in his work on "The American Apocalyptic Legacy," Daniel Wojcik affirms that the U.S. was conceptualized "as a terrestrial paradise of political, economic, and religious freedom unfettered by burdens of history" (21). Wojcik and Zamora echo Sacvan Bercovitch's formative *The American Jeremiad* which exposes the crucial role prophecy plays in American nationalism, tracing how the "new lands" of America represented the prophesied millennial paradise in early figures like Columbus and Cotton Mather all the way to through to individuals less directly associated with the American project such as William Blake and Nathaniel Hawthorne, all of whom drew on the American apocalypse tradition. In the American nineteenth century, the apocalypse genre retains elements from its religious predecessors - the origin mythos, dispossession, fall, and crisis that persist within the Judeo-Christian religious tradition of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan New England. From 17<sup>th</sup> century forward, the genre begins to become more secularized, transmuting its territorial and temporal traditions onto the edge of a frontier landscape notably un-peopled, heavily resourced ("wildly" forested), and born again through secular, scientific terms.

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<sup>156</sup> The American apocalypse holds a debt to the 'perennial' nature of the Jeremiad, which is defined by a stable Edenic origin, a prophetic notion of crisis, and redemption of the future. The apocalyptic crisis is the natural extension of what William Spanos calls the "perennial ritual" of the Jeremiadic tradition and notes that the Jeremiad and the apocalypse are both mired in the paradox of the exceptional—reinforcing the unity of a people at the same time as it acknowledges the people's failure (175).



Turner has become an iconic, even metonymic, figure for the frontier and the frontier's role in a "new" American environmental history and identity.<sup>157</sup> However, his thesis should be more critically conceived for the ways it masks the apocalyptic crisis of his era through the language of data, updating the apocalyptic tale of American exceptionalism with the secular logic of evolutionary science. His thesis, often summarized as "American democracy is formed on the frontier," is a long and circuitous relay of American progress that William Cronon calls a "flight from history." Treating Turner's thesis, and its frontier formulation, as anything *other* than fiction runs the risk of following the same a-historical flight-path. It ignores how deeply Turner's frontier is tangled up in racism and racial panic, and how the frontier of his thesis redeployed tropes common to religious apocalypse but reframed them through evolutionary logic, drawing upon science to justify the thesis as history where it more rightly should be understood as apocalyptic myth. In this way, Turner's thesis marks a turn from an older form of

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<sup>157</sup> Most scholars regard Turner as overturning previous orientations in American history as it rejected a commonly held scientific understanding of historical process by contradicting the widely accepted "germ theory" which believed that American identity was seeded by European germs (Jacobs 161). Moreover, Turner's thesis went against all serious study by historians who had, up until that point, focused on military and constitutional events (Linklater 250). However, rather than originating in European germs or consolidating nationalism through martial events, Turner's frontier merely regenerated older tropes associated with the supremacy of white settler sovereignty used to justify settler colonial violence. His thesis privileged the importance of a distinctly American place, specifically the American frontier, for American identity. It formalized already circulating notions of the formative effects of the American landscape, formalizing the West as the place where American settler sovereignty is formed. Turner built upon such looming figures in the intellectual genealogy of settler colonialism as Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Alexis de Tocqueville and others who, to differing degrees, held that the West was really what made the Americas, "America" (Bennett 41). Moreover, scholars like Donald Worster, William Katerberg, and John Mack Faragher note how Turner's thesis draws on, and concretizes, earlier notions of American identity uniquely forged on the frontier. These notions were renewed by Turner's thesis. As Richard Slotkin, Henry Nash Smith, and Richard Drinnon show, US national myth invents and regenerates its history and identity through certain settler colonial tropes associated with Turner's thesis, namely the ordained righteousness of colonial conflict (what Slotkin sees as the regenerative nature of frontier violence), a democracy born of free land (what Nash Smith sees as a costless "virgin land"), as well as the sacred imperatives of self-creation (what Drinnon notes belongs to a city-on-the-hill exceptionalism rooted in Puritanism) and self-renewal (which Nash Smith shows is necessarily violent). In its supposed newness, Turner's frontier thesis quickly became the assumed narrative in histories of US democratic becoming—controlling secondary and college US history curriculum from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century well into the 1980s (Nash Smith 3).

religious apocalypticism to a new scientific apocalypse form that retains the functions of the event to secure the exceptionalism of white settler sovereignty.<sup>158</sup>

### **Evolutionary Apocalypse**

Instead of environmental history, Turner's thesis should be read as the first American evolutionary apocalypse narrative, with its attendant national, racial, and environmental politics, placing history back *into* his legacy. Environmental historians typically cite twentieth century author Rachel Carson as ushering in the genre of environmental apocalypse. However, Turner should be read as an earlier progenitor of a genre that sees the ending of one world as a step in a larger evolutionary saga. In evolutionary apocalypse, rather than a threat of finality, the crisis of annihilation is scientifically coded as necessary to progress. This evolutionary apocalypse obtains throughout Turner's thesis, clearly signaled in the data of the 1890 Census that opens it.

Taking Turner at his word (and granting scholars who see him as primarily concerned with the frontier), the Census data regarding the frontier in Turner's opening showcases the link between the apocalyptic crisis of Turner's moment and the way he turns to the logic of the Census to begin his tale of evolutionary apocalypse as a way to contain the panic. Turner begins:

In a recent bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890 appear these significant words: 'Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier settlement, but at the present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports.' This brief statement marks the closing of a great historic movement. Up to our

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<sup>158</sup> Here, I contest Trachtenberg's claims that the nation needed "a coherent, integrated story of its beginnings and its development" that was "Neither apocalyptic in style nor explicitly visionary in purpose" though it agrees with Trachtenberg's claim that Turner would speak in a voice "neither romantic nor sentimental but 'scientific,' a view based on presumably sound Darwinian assumptions of evolution and organism" (14).

own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development. (17)

Most scholars agree that Turner was explicitly responding to the loss, or closure, of the frontier—a loss of the foundation for what Patricia Limerick calls “white America’s creation myth” (322). With the closure of the frontier, the essential element of the “constitution of the white Anglo-Saxon race” disappeared (Outka 153). While the frontier was a code for the myth of “free” (stolen) land, it was also a space for cultural regeneration by “transforming cultural difference into commonality and community,” in other words: a white commons (Thomas 281). Accordingly, the loss of the definable frontier presented an apocalyptic threat to American nation identity’s creation myth, its continued constitution, and its white communal identity.

Turner uses the census to respond to this apocalyptic threat - where the end of the age of “free land” is signaled by “isolated bodies of settlement” breaking up the once continuous movement of colonization westward into the expansive frontier. Instead of declaring the frontier disappeared (and with it, the white American mythos), Turner tells his audience that the Census shows the territory of the frontier is now too porous to be a unified thing - labeling it “closed,” a definition of the frontier that rhetorically reconstitutes the fragmented territory into a definable, secured space. Turner thus uses this “closing of a great historical moment” as a suture for the fragmented frontier, wielding a piece of Census data as a tool for containment of white possessive anxieties, fear that continues throughout his evolutionary apocalyptic fiction.

This opening declaration of the closure of the frontier that has come to define Turner’s thesis should instead be read as an initial moment rife with the apocalyptic

anxiety of American whiteness. The dissolution of the frontier—where “it could hardly be said” to exist as a definable line—meant a newly precarious US populace. Suddenly, the sovereignty of white American identity (or, as Turner quotes, the “common law of the settlers”) formed through possessing the “free” frontier had disappeared (33). In response, Turner repeats Andrew Jackson’s 1832 recommendation that “all public lands should be gratuitously given away to individual adventurers and to the States in which the lands are situated” (33). This despite the fact that the Census declares that such privatized possession of “public lands gratuitously given away” (stolen) is no longer possible. In Turner’s thesis, the frontier exemplifies the territorial contradictions in apocalyptic appeals—the assumed threat of dispossession paradoxically attending a stable territory. Turner responded to the apocalyptic threat of the lost frontier by redeploying the frontier as a symbolic containment of a more visceral apocalyptic threat: the threat of growing racial diversity presented to American settler sovereignty. The frontier, in Turner’s thesis, is the symbol that turns “crisis into consolidation,” a response to, and attempt to contain, apocalyptic threats to white national identity (Thomas 277).

Indeed, the era of the 1890s is a time marked by what Jackson Lears calls the “apocalyptic fervor” defining American national identity (6). The last half of the nineteenth century witnessed the slow end of the primary strategy by which American nationalism secured its white identity: the violent seizure of land via the sacred nature of private property. Throughout the nineteenth century, the regenerative myth of war had worked to secure and sanctify fences around stolen Indigenous lands. That “regeneration through violence” of Richard Slotkin’s formative study was part and parcel of what Neil Irvin Painter deems the “enlargement of whiteness.” According to Painter, the first

enlargement of American whiteness came through enfranchisement, citizenship qualified by property secured through martial ideology—savage warfare, territorial expansion, and agrarian reform.<sup>159</sup> Linking this imperial ambition to American obsession with renewal, Jackson Lears argues “The Martial Ethic turned organized violence into a regenerative rite” (31). Up until the end of the nineteenth century, the US had enough land that remained unincorporated, and enough threat of the “savage Other” in its sights, to easily justify unification through warlike, imperial conditions. Then, in the two decades before the end of the century, the US national imaginary faced a seemingly apocalyptic loss of the symbolic terms the nation had used to define itself—the US was running out of land. At the same time, the nation was running headlong into the fact that, given the newly explicit racial classifications on the 1890 Census, American national identity was facing profound change to its white possessive assumptions.<sup>160</sup>

Turner’s apocalyptic narrative reveals the underlying white possessive anxieties of American colonization. At the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. faced the dissolution of the imagined white “Eden” which shaped the country’s foundation. Turner’s thesis epitomizes the apocalyptic loss of the boundaries used to define its land and its “people” in an era where the violence of war that previously justified its defense was no longer tenable. “Free” land was vanishing while notions of citizenship as defined

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<sup>159</sup> The American legislative history of land appropriation, theft, and plunder under the guise of “improvement” demonstrates that a seemingly innocuous label, “agrarian reform,” masks the imperial violence constituted by, and justified through, the Martial ethic.

<sup>160</sup> US law sanctioned the reunification, relocation, and marriages of formerly enslaved people, Native peoples were granted citizenship through allotted land plots, and thousands of new immigrants from “the Austro-Hungarian empires, Jews from Russia and Poland, and Italians” arrived on the Eastern shores. These facts prompted what Painter deems “the second enlargement of whiteness” that incorporated Irish and Germans as “Nordics” and led to immigration restrictions such as Chinese exclusion (206). For more on the effects of changing US immigration populations on the “enlargement of American whiteness,” see Irvin Painter’s *The History of White People*.

by possession of property began to puncture the whiteness of American identity. Yet, Turner's thesis highlights the ways that land scarcity functions as an ideological tool to fortify white possession against the threats of growing racial diversity and Indigenous resistance - as a US nation whose land and people are under apocalyptic threat is only a viable narrative if the fiction of whiteness and its "free land" are understood as the primary motivators for such anxieties.

In this way, the era marks an important shift in the challenge to the whiteness of US settler sovereignty, a shift negotiated through the arc of American apocalypticism—from defining catastrophe and upheaval in martial and religious terms to deploying a scientific sanitization of the violence implicit in America's expanding imperial project. Elinor Shaffer argues, "by the end of the nineteenth century, apocalypse had descended into 'fin-de-siecle' decadent, degenerate, and at times already beckoning to a natural or pseudoscientific apocalypse in the form of biological exhaustion or entropic dissipation" (139). Turner's thesis is the paradigmatic example of an apocalyptic narrative updating the previous warlike, religious frame to a scientific logic applicable to the new imperialist frontiers - geographic and economic.<sup>161</sup> Apocalyptic narratives unify amidst tensions between the seemingly stable boundaries that define the people and the simultaneous threat of dissolution. Turner effected such transformation by utilizing a central tool in scientific racism: the census.

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<sup>161</sup> William Katerberg notes, "When the Western frontiers began to close, people argued for new imperialist frontiers abroad... the US soon went overseas, taking Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines and making them American territories and colonies" (22). Similarly, John Hoggund sees the "post-frontier crisis" resulting in a turning outward toward Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines (38). As exemplary, moving in to modernity the edge of the western frontier was transmuted onto the global market. America's global "apocalyptic impulse" not only "motivated settlement of American and westward expansion [but] led to US expressing global adversaries in cataclysmic terms" (Zamora 7). The Panic of 1893 is indicative of the economic instability that imperialist ventures outside the continental US sought to remedy.

Turner deploys the census—a well-established instrument for defining racial categories, racial threats, and securing whiteness. Throughout *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter shows the census as key to the creation and fortification of whiteness through and against racial categories, and integral to scientific racism’s authority. Opening with the census, Turner’s “new history” presents a frontier that symbolically averts the threat of what Jackson Lears calls “apocalyptic visions of race war” that the Census numbers revealed (104). The 1890 Census offered data that could easily be understood as a scientific, even biopolitical, technology put to work for an emergent genre of evolutionary apocalypse. In “Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers” Ian Hacking reveals how the census itself is one of the early signs of biopolitical creation and maintenance of identity categories. For US national identity, the category of “white” has been the lone constant in the history of the US Census (Painter 104). However, the 1890 Census marked the beginning of the use of the term “race” to classify people (U.S. Census Bureau). For the first time, the 1890 Census independently counted mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian, providing quantifiable categories for the fear best described by Leedom Medovoi as a Malthusian “demographic apocalypse” (125). In the Census, Turner found both apocalyptic threats to white national identity and a mode of narration capable of containing the apocalyptic fears that the Census counted.

In other words, Turner erases the “demographic apocalypse” that the Census revealed through the apocalyptic threat of the end of free land. James Bennett’s expansive study of Turner traces the ways that, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the American intellectual climate was rife with racialized fear that bore an important

connection to the loss of free land that the frontier represented. The impending exhaustion of free land, the “end of the frontier,” provided convenient “justification for halting the stream of southern European and oriental emigrants whose growing numbers, racists believed, were a real threat to the nation” (Bennett 24). The “end of the frontier” was used to justify tightening citizenship boundaries.<sup>162</sup> Similarly, Andrew Linklater’s work shows that American culture was less threatened by the disappearance of the frontier than the possibility of white national identity being dissolved by and into racial mixing.<sup>163</sup> The opening to Turner’s thesis must be understood in the context of these competing apocalypses, as it used the “frontier” as a way to contain racial threat by invoking the technology of scientific racism as symbolic protection for a white settler population. In the tradition of the apocalyptic genre, Turner’s census-backed claim that the US was “running out of land” was a fictional byproduct of US settler anxiety riddled by their historic role in Indigenous dispossession transmuted onto the fear of future dispossession of the white settler state.

The apocalyptic significance of the census in Turner’s thesis highlights the ways that the genre functions not only within US nationalist frames, but must be contextualized in terms of federal Indian policy. The 1890s witnessed a culmination of the violent nature of American nation-building and the rise of equally virulent internal opposition (Lears

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<sup>162</sup> As an important addendum to the bracketing of “racists,” this bracketing may unconsciously repeat the symbolic masking of historical and ongoing structural violence so effective since Turner. “Racists” are embedded in the structural violence of US national identity and its insatiable quest for land, so integral that they could never be bracketed.

<sup>163</sup> According to Linklater, the frontier represented “a deliberate turning away from the chief anxiety of the day. What most disturbed Americans about the 1890 census was not the end of the frontier of settlement, but the information that more than eight million of the country’s sixty-three million citizens had been born abroad in no fewer than thirty-seven different countries, from Africa and Austria through Turkey and Wales. Already made anxious by the rising level of immigration—in a decade it had increased by 50 percent to an average of five hundred thousand a year, equivalent to five million today in relation to the existing population—Turner’s contemporaries were especially alarmed by the racial mix” (259).



31). This era marked the second “enlargement of whiteness,” according to Painter, an extension that Robinson calls “white possession”—the meting out of “private property rights via the prism of citizenship” (121). This was an enlargement first federalized in the Homestead Acts and then legally extended to Indigenous peoples through the 1887 Dawes Act. The Dawes Act was immediately met with resistance from Native peoples across the US.<sup>164</sup> In response to the Dawes Act, the Ghost Dance movement arose as an apocalyptic prophetic tradition that refused the US government’s logic of private property by reasserting communal land holding. The religion prophesized the apocalyptic end of settler colonial rule. And its pacifism also refused to perform any spectacle of savagery, violence or warfare—significantly deploying apocalyptic appeals in order to refuse all tropes that American apocalypse emphasizes in justification of settler colonial violence.<sup>165</sup> Importantly, rather than being labeled a religious revival, the likes of which dotted the whole of the nineteenth century American landscape, or understood as a

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<sup>164</sup> Leading up to the Dawes Act, the US looked to bolster the reach of its power by extending the boundaries of its territory. Acting within this logic throughout the nineteenth century, the US related primarily to native peoples through the discourses and legal power of sovereignty. First, the US perpetrated forced removal of the savage enemy to annexed territory through the Doctrine of Discovery language of ward-ship, then opened up “free land” for settlement in the Homestead Act of 1862 in an effort to displace remaining tribes onto sanctioned reservations. Dawes was the exemplar finale of such extensions of sovereignty. Allotment offered citizenship to Native peoples willing to take an individual plot of land in exchange for the dissolution of communal land holdings and tribal associations. By “linking citizenship with both propriety and property,” Dawes implied a theory of America itself that incorporated Indians not as savages but as the “lowest order” of people (Trachtenberg 33). Typically referred to as the beginning of the Transition Period from pacification to assimilation of native peoples, allotment broadened the scope of citizenship to include those previously described as enemies into the political body of the US Nation State. Instead of strengthening the political body by expanding the boundaries of US sovereignty, Dawes failed to produce a homogenous national body as Native peoples continued to disrupt the narrative logic of US sovereignty.

<sup>165</sup> In its prophetic refusal, Wojcik reads the Ghost Dance as a part of, as well as a contestation to, the American apocalyptic legacy (28). The Ghost Dance belongs, as John Hall notes, to a host of “apocalyptic movements against colonialism” (142). It also offers a performance of what Manjikian sees as the function of apocalyptic fiction: an evaluation and interrogation of “contemporary political themes of progress, the spread of democracy, and what it means to be a ‘civilization’” (29). Ghost Dancing Indians interrogated the unity of US national identity typically stabilized through apocalyptic narrative, and they did it through the very same genre.

continuation of prophetic appeals in the well-worn tradition of religious apocalypse, Ghost Dance practices were described as a disease by most media sources. Rumors of an ‘Indian outbreak’ began to populate newspapers around the country, and publications fixated on what they called the “Messiah Craze” (Allen xvi). As Scott Pratt notes, the very fact that the dance was viewed as a ‘craze’ instead of a religious revival reduced the Ghost Dance from a potentially transformative prophetic politic and practice to “what [Franz] Boas called ‘a nervous disease’” (“Wounded Knee,” 156). Such attempts to pathologize the Ghost Dance were rampant in more than just the title of James Mooney’s *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, an account that repeatedly characterizes the practice as a “fever,” “mental condition,” and an “infection” (Taylor 1055). Most popular media sources narrated the Ghost Dance as a disease intrinsic to Indian identity *and* to newly broadened national body. Operating under “the threat of an outbreak,” Ghost Dancing Lakota were surrounded at Wounded Knee and slaughtered.<sup>166</sup> Though the threat of “disease” was already circulating in the US national imaginary prior to Wounded Knee, the massacre had to be understood as *internal* to the US nation state. The casualties were all US citizens—unarmed Lakota men, women and children, and the nation’s cavalry.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Most agree that in the over 300 Indians murdered at Wounded Knee, at least 100 were women and children while many of the Native men (referred to as “bucks”) passively held to the protection they thought the Ghost Dance religion offered them. According to the nation’s own Commanding General Nelson Miles, a large number of women and children were found “scattered along as they has been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives” (Coleman 350).

<sup>167</sup> Wounded Knee was understood in the public imaginary as the consequence of the natural (and naturalizing) processes of disease and cultural extinction (Pratt, “Genocide,” 6). As Pratt argues in his study of the genocidal logic of colonialism, “Wounded Knee emerged from a changed context. Indians were no longer seen as a threat to civilization, but rather were sick with a disease, a psychosis, that made them dangerous to the ‘innocent’ public, but not a systematic threat to the survival of settler society. American Indians were no longer the antithesis of white Americans, but rather part of the same humanity who suffered from certain deficits or an illness that blocked their participation in the burgeoning industrial society around them.” (“Genocide” 5)

These events show how the violence of apocalypse remained inherent even as its generic terms were forced to shift to stave off the seeming immediacy of US national identity crisis. The brutality at Wounded Knee gravely challenged the coherence and exceptionalism of the US national body by making visible the contradictions internal to the apocalyptic project of American exceptionalism.<sup>168</sup> Spanos details those contradictions:

In the unerring process of fulfilling its redemptive “errand,” the American exceptionalist ethos discloses the dark underside that the spectacular rhetoric and practice—the “shock and awe”—of relentless “progress” (“improvement,” “betterment,” “settlement,” in the language of the early settlers) had hitherto enabled Americans to disavow (or represent by euphemism, “collateral damage”) in the pursuit of their errand’s “end.” (181)

The Dawes Act, the Ghost Dance, and Wounded Knee certainly exposed “the dark underside” of American exceptionalism, challenging a notion of sovereignty intimately tied to exceptionalist discourse. These events all evidence a vital contest to western sovereignty and its violent “(re)production and naturalization of national space” that exposes the contradictions that Mark Rifkin sees as internal to the function of sovereignty in the US (88).<sup>169</sup> According to Rifkin, US sovereignty functions “as a negative presence,

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<sup>168</sup> Here, it is important to note that, in legal considerations, the US persisted in justifying the events at Wounded Knee in martial terms even as the public discourse shifted. Within the US legal system, the case of Plenty Horses further exposed the paradox of US martial logic. Plenty Horses was tried for murdering an Army officer eight days after Wounded Knee. The central argument in his trial revolved around whether a state of war existed between the United States and the Lakota Nation. If it was ruled that a state of war did not exist (because the Lakota were by then US citizens), then the soldiers involved with the killings at Wounded Knee should also be charged with murder. If the state of war did exist, either side in the conflict may kill each other without threat of criminal penalty. In such a case Plenty Horses should not be tried for murder. Most scholars agree that Plenty Horses was acquitted in order to avoid the prosecution of the Calvary men who had already been awarded Congressional Medals of Honor. For more on this see Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz’s *The Indigenous People’s History of the United States*, 156.

<sup>169</sup> Rifkin intervenes in Giorgio Agamben’s state of exception, seemingly divorced from territory, by challenging the individualizing nature of Agamben’s “bare life” and rejecting Agamben’s “depiction of sovereignty as a self-confident exercise of authority free from anxiety over the legitimacy of state actions” (90). In the context of settler-state operations, Rifkin argues that sovereignty performs the structuring of

as what Native peoples categorically lack, or at the least only have in some radically diminished fashion managed by the United States” (89). Rifkin examines how Native peoples are contained through the “language of exception, of inclusive exclusion, [which] discursively brings native peoples into the fold of sovereignty” (90). While the Dawes Act did attempt to extend a weakened, or “radically diminished” form of sovereignty by offering U.S. citizenship through dissolution of tribal governance and land holdings, the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee revealed that extension as a violent form of legally sanctioned incorporation or extinction, or both. However, Indigenous contestations to allotment like the Ghost Dance, as well as the US government’s violent response to such refusals, confirms Rifkin’s claim that “available logics of U.S. jurisdiction are unable to incorporate Native peoples comfortably, and that continued Native presence pushed against the presumed coherence of the U.S. territorial and jurisdictional imaginary” (89). By refusing to be incorporated into the assumed coherence of US settler sovereignty, the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee exposed a gap internal to the paradoxes of Western sovereignty and the flexibility of the apocalypse genre in the American context to narrate over those paradoxes.

Turner’s “new history” is emblematic of this flexibility as it updates the religious apocalyptic genre to a secular, scientific containment of apocalyptic racial anxieties. Just three sentences after Turner’s most oft-quoted introductory paragraph, Turner reaches back to 1817 to quote John C. Calhoun’s famous statement that ““We are great, and rapidly – I was about to say fearfully – growing!”” (19). Looking past Turner’s citation–

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violence: “The State has been described as an entity that exercises a monopoly on the legitimate exercise of violence, and what I am suggesting is that the state of exception produced through Indian policy creates a monopoly on the legitimate exercise of legitimacy, an exclusive uncontested right to define what will count as a viable legal or political formulation” (91). Settler colonial structures of violence work, in part, through the “erasure of the politics of collectivity and occupancy” (94).

thirty years post Civil War—of a man who provided much of the most repeated intellectual justification for slavery, it is important to note that Turner includes Calhoun’s self-interruption, “I was about to say fearfully.” Yet, Turner does not draw attention to the threatened national body in Calhoun’s slight concession of fear, nor does Turner acknowledge Calhoun’s historic role in protecting the sovereignty of (white settler) American identity. Instead, he opens his thesis with the supposed problem of the 1890 Census without ever mentioning the “growing” threats that Calhoun casually acknowledged eighty years before, threats newly itemized by the calculated racial categories in the very same document Turner uses to bookend his thesis. Turning away from the racial anxieties of his day, Turner declares that Calhoun “touched the distinguishing feature of American life,” and Turner looks to an evolutionary model to narrate over the “growing” threat inadvertently revealed in Calhoun’s words (19).

Turner’s evolutionary model reworks the mythic tropes of “going Native” and the “disappearing Native” already well established in nineteenth century American literature. Tropes of the “disappearing savage” and “going Native” are what Shari Huhndorf calls America’s “cherished national ritual,” often associated with James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* but also found in the writings of Henry David Thoreau and others. The thesis claims that what Calhoun astutely observes is “a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area” (19). This “return to primitive conditions” is the site of America’s continual rebirth and in this continual “process of evolution,” settlers must first “go Native” but

only in order to evolve, over and over again, into a distinctly American product (19). In full detail, Turner asserts:

Now, the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs. [...] The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. (20)

In this hypothetical origin story, Turner conflates Native peoples with the now-disappeared frontier, using both “disappearances” as the necessary means by which the settler body is overwhelmed: “at the frontier, the environment is first too strong for the man.” But then the settler is reborn as Native, “fits himself into Indian clearings and follows Indian trails.” “He” emerges a strengthened, renewed, and distinctly American identity. Here, Turner’s evolutionary paradigm updates well-worn US national narrative tropes regarding Native peoples as well as apocalyptic tropes of rebirth into a sort of mythohistorical evolutionary origin story, complete with “stages of development” that the thesis describes.

Turner’s evolutionary stages offer a paradigm case of what Jean O’Brien calls “firsting” and “lasting.” O’Brien argues that American history is the primary means of “forging Anglo-Saxon nationalism” (4). This “history” is fortified through non-Indian narrative strategies that “produced their own modernity by denying modernity to Indians” (xxii). The process of “firsting” declares non-Indians the first to set up the institutions of

proper social order, claiming ownership through an “authentic history” (O’Brien 4). Similarly, “lasting” purifies the landscape in order to replace the Indian through historical practices that argue settlers have permanently supplanted Indians. This firsting and lasting can be seen in the excerpt above, but it is also confirmed in the evolutionary “stages” that make up half of Turner’s extended thesis. Turner detailed the “Stages of Frontier Advance” as successive types of frontier. In order, the section titles of his thesis professes America developed from the “Indian Trader’s Frontier,” through “The Rancher’s Frontier,” to “The Farmer’s Frontier,” arriving at “Industrial Independence” associated with “the extensive and valuable trade of a rising empire.” Here, Turner draws on Henry Rowe Schoolcraft’s understanding of human development that was elaborated by ethnographers and, later, American anthropology.<sup>170</sup> These stages of development all begin with the assumed disappearance, or “lasting,” of Native peoples, in order to open the land for “free” possession—for the “firsting” of American settlement.

These stages offer a definitive instance of the “replacement” process O’Brien highlights as part of the historical narrative of US national identity. Where “culture meets nature, culture replaces nature, and the landscape is purified of Indians in a stark break from the past,” the settler replaces the Indian to claim a history beginning with “proper ownership” (O’Brien xxvi). The only divergence in Turner’s “culture” is its assumption of a scientific frame to authorize itself as a replacement history: “The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line we read this continental page from west to east we find the record of social evolution” (Turner 23). In Turner, the process that O’Brien notes in early New England writers is a scientific, social Darwinist account.

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<sup>170</sup> See Prucha’s *The Great Father*, especially his coverage of the “disasterous outbreak of the Sioux in 1890,” leading to the Wounded Knee massacre (247).

This new historical account of firsting, lasting, and replacing—the perennial rebirth of the American on the frontier—is not history at all, but an evolutionary myth of apocalyptic time. The “return to primitive conditions” in Turner’s new origin story is the site of America’s “perennial rebirth” that is “continually beginning over again on the frontier” (19). In this recurrent evolution, the perpetual “beginning over again,” Turner’s apocalyptic time sees settlers eternally “driven back” to near destruction in order to permanently secure future claims of proper ownership. The settler’s right to Indian land rests on the assertion that “embedded in claims of proper ownership are notions of permanence” (O’Brien 98). The process that Turner details for his history uses the frontier as a mythic origin point. Turner’s “history” actually “marginalizes the role of violence in the development of the Frontier” and thus “obscures the historical role of violence” (Slotkin 55). Turner’s thesis is exemplary of what Hall sees as a central change in apocalypse narratives in the nineteenth century, the “bending of apocalypse toward ever stronger understandings of history as both a *telos* and reflexive project of purposeful engagement” (Hall 131). Thus, Turner’s new evolutionary “history” reflexively establishes an origin point as well as repeats the ever-revisable apocalyptic time where US national identity finds permanent renewal.

Time in Turner’s apocalypse is what Kevin Bruyneel calls “colonial time”: Diachronic temporality structured by dispossession, animated by what is deemed sellable. Instead of acknowledging the real historicity of frontier conflict, Turner uses the frontier to mythologize an origin for white settlers, an origin that he labels a “new history,” ironically and unwittingly acknowledging the slippage between history and myth in US national narrative as well as in the apocalypse genre. In Turner, the crisis of racial threat



is masked by the “apocalyptic” loss of the frontier. That “frontier” is then used to narrate over the violence of colonial history through the sanitizing lens of science. In doing so, it continually produces “new” memories through which to constitute an ever-renewing white settler nationalist narrative. By turning crisis into consolidation, Turner’s thesis showcases the stability of the apocalyptic arc, even as it shifts into a new evolutionary apocalyptic version.<sup>171</sup>

Turner’s evolutionary apocalypse makes use of the teleology of social and “natural” Darwinism to protect and reestablish the secular-sacred whiteness of the US national body. Through an apocalyptic frame, Turner’s thesis narrates White American civilization as the evolutionary apex, a progressivist project that secularized and naturalized manifest destiny. While secular apocalypticism eschews prophecy as means of divining the future, it instead relies on “a naturalistic worldview, indebted to science and to social criticism rather than to theology” (Veldman 3). In that vein, the thesis declares:

Thus, civilization in America has followed the arteries made by geology. Pouring an ever richer tide through them, until at last the slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines; the wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing ever more numerous. It is like the steady growth of a complex nervous system for the originally simple, inert continent. (26)

Turner’s geologic metaphor naturalizes the progress of colonialism at the same time as it contends that the complex (white) American body grows out of the conflation of

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<sup>171</sup> In his chapter “Evolution and Apocalypse in the Golden Age,” Michael Page credits H.D Wells with inaugurating the genre of “evolutionary apocalypse.” Unlike Turner, H.G. Wells was a fierce opponent of eugenics, an early defender of Black rights, and a particularly progressive critic of Zionism. *The Time Machine*, Wells’ first evolutionary apocalypse, was published two years after Turner’s Thesis. When thinking about the evolutionary apocalypse in relation to issues of race and territory, H.G. Wells’ versions of this sub-genre offer a rich contrast that improves upon Turner’s earlier evolutionary apocalypse.

aboriginal occupants and nature. In other places, the thesis uses the term vital organs as a stand in for a pre-ordained, violence-free American national identity. In these metaphors, Turner's evolutionary apocalypse is exemplary of, in Andrew McMurry's words, the "regurgitation of this or that bio-ideology [a]s simply a prettying up operation of power structures already secured" (16). Turner's evolutionary frame updated the apocalypse genre to secure the exceptional whiteness of US national identity.

The "germ theory" does not disappear in Turner—it morphs into an evolutionary language through the logic of immunity. Turner's description of a settler pushed to the edge and facing obliteration in an environment "at first too strong" only to emerge stronger executes the exact logic of exceptionalism that Mary Manjikian finds at the heart of the apocalypse genre, exposing the immunological function of the genre as well. Manjikian writes: "The doctrine of exceptionalism implies a type of immunity" because "exceptionalism can be seen as a sort of 'vaccine' which renders a nation invulnerable to the sorts of dangers which threaten other nations – the possibility of famine, natural disaster, or foreign invasion" (153). Indeed, according to Matthew Taylor's work on immunity at the end of the nineteenth century, Turner delivered his thesis at a historical moment when "germ theory and immunology consolidate to establish the idea of 'immunity-as-self-defense'" (Taylor 1066). By collapsing the Indian into the now-disappeared frontier, Turner transmuted the individual nature of Richard Henry Pratt's "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" logic onto a national body in need of the protection that immunization could offer. Turner figures the frontier, and by conflation the Indian, into a

necessary immunization for the American body.<sup>172</sup> In the template of apocalypse genre, the crisis here is a disease that is used to fortify the national body.

Turner's thesis secures this immunity through paradoxes that seem immanent in the apocalypse genre. There is a territorial paradox in his notion of the frontier as a territory that once defined the American people: now so porous it can no longer constitute a definable boundary and is thus ironically declared closed. This paradox, once reconceived through Louis Owens' definition of the frontier as a border or hybrid space, relinquishes its claim on a permanent space and is instead revealed to be more of a mythic ideal of white possession. Turner's temporal paradox exists in a present and future immunity to crisis through a new "historical" past. The "history" of Turner's thesis is indeed as mythic as the apocalypse's territories have almost always been. Turner's thesis and its "new history" of immune American settler white sovereignty is nothing more than an evolutionary update to the old exceptionalism shored up by the function of the event in the apocalypse genre. Turner responds to the multiple apocalyptic threats of his historical moment—racial and environmental—with a mythic fiction of history where the frontier experience is narrated through an evolutionary apocalypse as the site of immunity. The frontier experience is the site of this evolutionary apocalypse. Turner transmutes the lawless frontier into an evolutionary space where the settler body is made immune to the violence of its origin, its continuing operations, and its proprietary rights to a territorialized future. Despite this evolutionary update, however, the function of the frontier remains the same: securing the exceptionalism of white settler sovereignty.

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<sup>172</sup> Though beyond the limits of this argument, Turner turns to the newly global market as the new frontier for a strengthened national body. In this way, Turner's Thesis could be read as an early document of what Jodi Byrd calls "Zombie imperialism" whereby settler sovereignty is masked as "post-racial, liberal democratic apocalyptic vision of pluralistic cosmopolitanism" (225).

As apocalyptic literature, then, Turner's thesis reveals immunity is really just scientific metaphor for acquittal. If Turner's thesis continues to be regarded as history, and not regarded as fiction, the same patterns of white-innocence charged by racialized fear are continuously reauthorized in the heart of American environmental and racial imaginations. When thinking about environmental apocalypse, especially how to avoid future catastrophes associated with the past, present, and future resource exploitation, history is bound to repeat itself unless the "thesis" is relegated to the realm of apocalyptic fiction.

His frontier thesis exemplifies the ways American identity is wedded to the contradictions of the American apocalyptic tradition, where the past, present, and perpetual apocalyptic violence of dispossession perpetrated by US settler sovereignty are narrated over through the apocalyptic threat of the nation's own dispossession. What's more, his thesis not only highlights the apocalyptic anxieties of his historical moment, it also reveals the way that US national history and identity is structured by apocalyptic conflicts—driven by the continual dispossession of Native peoples and motivated by the threat of an immediate future in which white sovereignty is dispossessed of its land. Most importantly, once rightly understood as an apocalyptic fiction, Turner's story of the end of the world of free land reveals the ways the apocalyptic anxieties of white settler sovereignty can overdetermine the trajectory and political purposes of the genre. It alerts us to the ways apocalyptic fictions can operate through the logic of science as well as the ways apocalyptic tropes can be used to imagine beyond the extinction imperatives of white possession.

## The White City

Following Indigenous resistance to allotment, Turner's thesis epitomizes the apocalyptic insecurities of white possession and its need for an equally apocalyptic cosmology. The location of its delivery emphasizes the newly scientific, evolutionary apocalypse that Turner narrates. Inside the 1893 Chicago World's Fair stood the White City, the fair's culminating achievement, an area whose name and design expressed the sanitized, scientific social Darwinism of Turner's origin story on a grand infrastructural scale (Cronon 31). Only three years after Wounded Knee, the 1893 Columbian Exhibition was the most spectacular attempt to reassert US national unity and supremacy to date, envisioning itself as the "fulfillment of a destiny that Columbus had long ago set in motion," and within which Turner delivered his paean to American exceptionalism (Cronon 341). Even scholars critical of Turner, such as William Cronon, celebrate the fair, which honored the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the so-called New World.<sup>173</sup> The fair's "Age of Discovery" theme described a vision of all nations joining in celebrating the discovery of the Americas. Though the name may now overtly signal its supremacist sentiment, the fair was dubbed the "White City" for its neoclassical buildings, an architectural recapitulation of US democracy's claim to ancient (Western) origins and progressivist teleology. Frederick Douglas deemed the White city the "white sepulcher," an end-of-world description for the death-drive of whiteness that hints at how the apocalyptic genre can undercut the same (Trachtenberg 220). Still, the exposition made art history, set attendance records, boosted national pride, and signaled the US beginning to emerge as a (white) world economic and technological power.

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<sup>173</sup> See Cronon's chapter "White City Pilgrimage" in *Nature's Metropolis*, where Cronon's reverence for the technological accomplishments and grandeur of the fair are clear, though it could be said that Cronon was describing - even ventriloquizing - the public perception rather than issuing an endorsement himself.

The fair itself highlights how challenges to the unity of US national identity are often indexed through apocalyptic narrative—from the martial apocalypses of territorial expansion underwritten by the logic of private property to the newly scientific version of apocalyptic threat offered by the standard of disease. By 1893, the US was at a critical juncture as it embraced the rise in cities, industrial capitalism, and corporate business at the same time as it attempted to cling to older values of rural American individualism (Trachtenberg 15). Additionally, the financial panic of 1893 further unsettled the image of the US as a serious contender in the world’s marketplace. The nation turned to Chicago, and science, as “planners of the Chicago World’s Fair aimed primarily to ‘resolve’ (at least symbolically) the monumental problems of the moment” (Hundorf, *Going Native*, 36). The Columbian Exposition was meant to stabilize a newly scientific national imaginary through a sanitized, whitened cosmology. The ethnological exhibits at the Midway Plaisance offered a scientifically-framed lesson in racial hierarchy.

Its racial displays moved progressively whiter as what Richard Slotkin calls the fair’s “mythic space” performed the most common thesis for nation building: the still resonant Manifest Destiny fueled by the Doctrine of Discovery with Columbus as its statuesque symbol. Yet the nation had recently confronted the violence of such myths of discovery at Wounded Knee in the bloodied and strewn bodies of women, children, and the calvary. The recent violent end of “discovery” associated with territorial expansion and savagery, and the contemporary racial and economic uncertainty, presented real risks to what the fair sought to celebrate. However, the fair’s spatial and rhetorical exhibitions contained those apocalyptic threats through the teleology of scientific utopianism.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> For more scholarship on the utopianism of the fair and Chicago see William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis*, or the compelling narrative treatment in *The Devil in the White City*.

The fair's spatial hierarchies contained and sanitized previously deployed discourses of savagery through an evolutionary teleology, avoiding the nation's colonial past by (literally) looking toward a white utopia. As Lee D. Baker confirms in his study of the construction of race in the United States, "Ideas of racial and cultural superiority and inferiority were reified by the architecture and physical layout of the expansive exposition" (Baker 56). The fair's overall structure and exhibits "were arranged in an obvious evolutionary hierarchy that resonated with many White Americans' seemingly intuitive understanding of racial inferiority" (ibid. 57). As exemplary, the "Human Zoo" exhibits displayed people deemed non-white as sub-human in order to show that "White citizens were believed to be the most advanced in history" (ibid. 56). Similarly, the spatial organization of the fair "presented the racial plan of Social Darwinism in an entertaining and simple framework" (ibid. 57).

The fair contained all nations within the US imaginary though an evolutionary course: a narrow tunnel leading through purported savagery and opening onto the purity of the conspicuously American White City. The exposition's architecture testified to the enveloping power of "scientific authority" as the new defining characteristic of progressive cultural evolution. If the body of the nation needs a unified narrative, the US now firmly grounded it in science. Through the "Homogenized scientific idealism [that] was pervasive at the fair," Native peoples were transformed into nothing more than the "trophies of colonialism" and "trophies of scientific racism juxtaposed against the formidable white neoclassical architecture of the massive buildings" in the White City (Rinehart 409, 405). The fair was the first US event to feature "live" displays, but unlike the exhibition's European predecessors, "the fair reflected primarily on internal

colonialism” (Hundorf, *Mapping*, 52). In fact, the architecture of the fair reinforced the social Darwinism implicit in relatively new evolutionary explanations of colonization at the same time as it framed earlier notions of savagery within its sanitized, white-washed walls. The White City and Turner’s evolutionary apocalypse aims to strengthen the national body through a type of racial and environmental inoculation.

The fair staged a scientific spectacle of architecture and ideology masking the brutality of genocide, slavery, land theft, and white supremacist fictions which Turner’s thesis narrated into history. That scientific update to an apocalyptically fueled American project was prompted by a preceding and uninterrupted tradition of Indigenous resistance, forcefully asserted in the Ghost Dance and continuing at the fair itself- where Indigenous peoples debated, contested, and imagined beyond the white-world making of the White City. Indeed, surrounding the fair and penetrating inside its most important single day event, Chicago Day, contestations were levied through the language of apocalypse. Just as Turner should be understood as responding to threats such as the Ghost Dance, rather than originating a new American history, so, too, did Indigenous resistance prefigure any consolidation of American identity within the fair itself.

### **Pokagon’s Apocalypses**

Months before Turner’s thesis called for attention to the American land’s influence on American character, Bodéwademi Simon Pokagon’s “Red Man’s Rebuke” was being sold outside the gates of the White City. Well before Turner turned attention to the role of American place in historical narrative, Pokagon was contesting Turner’s “history” by narrating the importance of the very spot in which both men spoke: Chicago. His apocalyptic “Red Man’s Rebuke,” leveraged his historical relationship to the lands of



Chicago, a place that was considered a frontier of US removal and erasure well into the twentieth century. “Red Man’s Rebuke”—both its published and orally delivered versions - offer a vital alternative apocalypse narrative that challenges the apocalyptic anxiety of dispossession fueling Turner’s history. Where Turner’s apocalyptic narrative showed that “white colonial paranoia, injury, and worrying are inextricably tied to an anxiety about dispossession,” Pokagon’s apocalyptic text emphasizes, “how the unfinished business of indigenous sovereignty continues to shape and disturb the security of settler white sovereignty” (Moreton-Robinson 152). Pokagon’s “Rebuke” resists Turner’s extinction narrative, highlighting how “Claims in texts about Indian extinction fail even as they are being made” (O’Brien 136).

The printed “Rebuke” contests claims about Indian extinction that were being forwarded by the fair’s exhibitions and Turner’s thesis. Then, two and half months after Turner delivered his speech, Pokagon delivered an oral version insisting on Native survival to a crowd of 75,000 people in the Terminal Plaza (Low 63). Pokagon’s revised oral delivery of his published text further evidences a mode of sovereignty that both ruptures and extends far beyond the Western political tradition. Both the oral and the written forms of Pokagon’s narrative offer apocalyptic appeals that challenge the stability of Turner’s tropes and refuse the mythic idea that “Indians exist in ahistorical temporality where they can only be victims of change not active subjects in making of change” (O’Brien 105). Instead, Pokagon deploys divergent accounts of territory and time to challenge the anxiety of dispossession at work in Turner. Pokagon offers an apocalyptic history that not only redefines the terms of disease found in Turner’s thesis, it also prophecies a life beyond the death march of settler sovereignty.

While Turner created pseudo-history out of already-circulating popular myths in order to claim the importance of place to American identity, Pokagon crafted a mythic persona out of his complexly rooted history in Chicago. Pokagon was the son of Chief Leopold, who was forced to sign the Treaty of Chicago in 1833 when Pokagon was only 12 years old and who is credited with securing ancestral homelands for his people in a time when most Native peoples were being removed.<sup>175</sup> Pokagon often invoked his lineage as proof of his dedication to his people and understood the social capital available through a Western education, as he manipulated details of his education to gain the respect of white audiences.<sup>176</sup> Pokagon's status as "Chief" is equally contested mythology. Though he was the last son of Chief Leopold, and signed almost every document 'Chief Simon Pokagon,' his position as chief was disputed by many of the Bodéwadmik. Yet, white journalists and writers readily accepted and repeated that title and despite (and perhaps because of) his unauthorized leadership, Pokagon gained notoriety and great popularity among white Americans (Brown Ruoff 278). The narratives that find Pokagon a dishonorable assimilationist or a noble leader of his people are both constructions erected from the materials of US national narrative.

Just as Lucy Maddox's opening to *Citizen Indians* attests, Pokagon remains exemplary of the multiple and complicated positions of Native people in the context of

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<sup>175</sup> The same year as Jacksonian Removal, Chief Leopold's strategic foresight led him to seek an alliance with the Catholic church. The band became early Catholic converts, a conversion that protected them from removal as well as the Potawatomi Trail of Death five years later (Low 31, 35). The Pokegnak Bodewadmik still reside in Michigan and Indiana, a persistence largely credited to Chief Leopold strategic leveraging of Western religious affiliations (Fletcher 86).

<sup>176</sup> Pokagon's educational history is unclear, though most agree that Pokagon to some degree fabricated the details. Some scholarship holds that Pokagon attended missionary school for five years, while Pokagon himself claimed that he attended Notre Dame and Oberlin colleges though there are no records of his attendance (Hulst 81, Cushing Davis 33). A tentative example can be found in David Treuer's work, which argues that Pokagon probably attended Notre Dame manual labor school that has no affiliation with the university, but Pokagon probably left off the latter part of the school's name in order to take advantage of the university's prestige (416).

US colonization and its discourses of American progress (3). Maddox joins Phil Deloria to acknowledge the many ways Native peoples were performing their identities and histories, individual and collective, “before a largely white American public” (Maddox 5, Deloria 104). Both Maddox and Deloria mention Pokagon as exemplary of the complexity typical to American Indian intellectual activity in the 1890s, though neither delve into the details of his fraught relationship with his people. Though Pokagon was a vocal advocate for Indian rights, he “aroused considerable anger among his band because in 1881 he sold for cash, without consent of tribe, discounted notes that were supposedly guaranteed by anticipated settlements of Potawatomi claims and because, in 1894, he established a rival, unauthorized Business committee to pursue his own settlement claims” which his people rejected (Brown Ruoff 277). In 1896, President Cleveland paid a sum to the Bodéwademi that a Chicago reporter inaccurately credited Pokagon with obtaining, a mistake that must have furthered discontent surrounding Pokagon’s increasing fame (ibid. 278). His troubled relationship with his people was not all media-manufactured, though: in 1897, Pokagon “purportedly acting on behalf of the whole band but without their consent or knowledge, sold the quitclaim the band’s whole interest in the Chicago lakefront” (ibid. 278). This motley history and Pokagon’s public persona are part of the same complicated figure,<sup>177</sup> the complexity of an individual living through, responding to, and hoping to survive such apocalyptic times.

However, though Pokagon enjoyed much fame especially following his appearance at the World’s Fair, he has all but disappeared from collective memory. The scholarship that has been done has ranged from conflating Pokagon’s non-fiction with his

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<sup>177</sup> Pokagon’s complex attempts at leadership attest to Rey Chow’s affirmation that “The native” is neither “the defiled image of colonialism” nor a faultless “non-duped” figure of purity (54).

novel, or preoccupations with the questionable authorship of Pokagon's only fictional work.<sup>178</sup> A majority of thinkers who have engaged with Pokagon have found him "a white man's kind of Indian" or performing a charade of ventriloquism for conciliatory politics (Dippie 204, Trachtenberg 47). Others note the complexity of Pokagon's position, seeing him as "naturalized to the point of invisibility, his effort to present a complex message failing to even register as signification" (Berliner 76). As vital exceptions, Lucy Maddox opens *Citizen Indians* with Pokagon's fair performance as emblematic of Indian intellectual engagement with and refusal of discourses of American Progress politics of the period. Most recently, John M. Low's *Imprints* does much to recover Bodéwademi historical and continued presence in Chicago (5).<sup>179</sup> As part of that history, Pokagon's persistent presence in Chicago and his leveraging of apocalyptic extinction and assimilation appeals attest to the significance of relationships to place, and to place as a historical agent.

Pokagon's performance at the fair must be understood in complex relation to his history in that place – a history of coercion, violence, and agency. In this complexity, Pokagon's performance at the fair, his presence and his text, should be more aptly understood as a type of x-mark, what Scott Lyons defines as "a contaminated and coerced sign of consent made under conditions that are not of one's making. It signifies power and a lack of power, agency and a lack of agency" (2-3). When Indianness is positioned in opposition to modernity, any engagement with modernity is a

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<sup>178</sup> For example, scholars such as James A. Clifton have asserted Pokagon's novel *Queen of the Woods* must have been authored by his editor's wife because of the novel's highly sentimental prose.

<sup>179</sup> Low's book examines the ways some Pokagon Potawatomi community members found to retain a distinct Indigenous presence in Chicago, as well as the ways their resistance represented both their rejection of assimilation into the mainstream and their desire for inclusion into the larger contemporary society without forfeiting their Native identities.

radical act that challenges those limitations. In Low's words, "Pokagon's presence served as a third alternative to 'civilized Indians' under government control within the fairgrounds and the 'savages' of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show playing just outside the Exposition" (62). Indeed, Pokagon and his "Rebuke" demonstrate the profound agency with which Native peoples engaged the past and ongoing apocalypse of colonization, and the ways in which the genre of apocalypse reveals political contestations over historical truth.

### **The Apocalypse(s) of Pokagon's Place**

In 1893, Pokagon attended the Columbian Exposition, an experience that must have been marked by apocalyptic trauma. First, as one of the more than 200,000 visitors on opening day, Pokagon witnessed the Bodéwademi's apocalyptic history overtly erased (Cushing Davis 42). Pokagon saw only representations of Indian past on display, and, as the "descendent of Columbus, Duke of Veragua, sat in place of honor, no one thought to invite/honor Indians of that place" and, in the face of such erasure, "Pokagon and others of his people attended unasked" (Hulst 91). Yet, "Perhaps more disturbing was the front-page report of the encampment of the Potawatomi on the Midway, 'descendants of Chicago's original settlers,' described as the 'Return [of the] Freaks'" (Cushing Davis 47). Pokagon's first visit to this spectacle of white mythos erected on and over his people's homeland surely asked Pokagon to confront, through its very absence, the brutality of losing his father, his land, and his people, and the violence of continued displacement. Instead of rebuking the fair and never returning, Pokagon quickly wrote "Red Man's Rebuke," printed the tract on birch bark booklets, and sold them just outside

the fair gates (Witalec, et al, 516). The birch bark booklet exemplifies the agency with which Pokagon responded to the apocalyptic trauma of the Exposition.

The booklet's birch bark cover must be understood in its Bodéwademi, as well as broader Anishinaabeg, context. Birch bark is an incredibly important resource for Pokagon's Bodéwademi people, and the larger culturally related Anishinaabeg group of nations. Bodéwademi Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* details the cultural use of the birch for canoes, wigwams, tools, baskets, scrolls for writing, tinder for fire, but also for its antifungal properties used as a traditional medicine, which Kimmerer tells us "Our people call it *shkitagen*" (363-64). The birch bark of Pokagon's booklet is reaffirmation of the long-term Anishinaabeg tradition of literacy, self-representation, literary production, and community health.

It is worth considering, even, the booklet itself as an offering of medicine from Pokagon to his largely white audience. Some scholars claim that in circulating his materials on birch bark, Pokagon tried to mass-produce native traditions which "can be thought of as a kind of progressive kitsch, as Pokagon reinscribes tourist art for his own didactic purposes" (Berliner 79). However, though attentive to the cultural importance of the birch, speculations as to the commodity ethics of Pokagon's material choices bypass Pokagon's own words. He states that he chose birch bark "symbolically fit for the book because it was so useful in Indian life, and because, like the Indian it is vanishing from our forests" (preface). This statement leverages the vanishing and ecological Indian tropes integral to US national identity in order to assert continued presence of Native peoples. Pokagon's use of analogy— "like the Indian"—also emphasizes a continual, relational understanding of survival echoed throughout his printed tract. The birch bark of

the booklet attests to adaptive agency and continued survival of Native peoples amidst the erasure in tropes of “vanishing” and the erasure implicit in US national origin myths that Pokagon’s booklet also disrupts.

The image printed on the booklet’s cover and its prefatory statement both attest to an vitality and assertive presentness that complexly leverages the apocalyptic expectations of US national belonging. The cover depicts the landing of Columbus. This US national origin story is re-presented as a scene of coming apocalypse as the image is marked by the “Rebuke” of its title. Pokagon’s birch bark cover thus objects to the celebration of “origin” in the Columbian Exposition.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, the booklets were sold outside the fair—an explicit rebuke of a common assertion that Native peoples were unable to understand economies and thus had no future in the modern American landscape. Contrary to a vanishing tragedy, Pokagon’s “Rebuke” insisted on Native presence—a presence that caught the attention of Mayor Carter Harrison who secured Pokagon’s invitation to attend on Chicago Day (Cushing Davis 47). In his first experiences of the fair, Pokagon must have been asked to relive a past marked by the material and social collapse akin to an end of the world scenario.

Indeed, performing within the context of historical and ongoing apocalypse, Pokagon had intimate knowledge of what are typically regarded as mere tropes of the

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<sup>180</sup> Though, as Jonathan Berliner argues, the cover “can also be read as a conciliatory naturalization of Columbus’s landing” (81). To emphasize that conciliatory reading of the cover, Berliner cites the fact Pokagon dedicated some copies of the “Rebuke” to William Penn, Roger Williams, and Helen Hunt Jackson. By offering this evidence, Berliner is presumably asserting that dedications to white people must imply endorsement of colonization. William Penn and Roger Williams were both known for their ethical and respectful relationships with Native peoples, while Helen Hunt Jackson was a tireless contemporary advocate for Indian rights. Though all three of these figures represent a version of settler-colonial logic that asserts well-intentioned but still assimilationist programs, the recognition of their more compassionate model of US-Indian relations is not the same as endorsement of Columbus or a “historical” origin story for ongoing colonial violence. The reduction of one to another, even if only implicitly, continues to authorize proclamations of Native static victimhood. Instead, Pokagon was an active agent.

genre. He lived them.<sup>181</sup> Lisa Cushing Davis places Pokagon within this historical and geographical location. As a special guest in all significant events that day, Pokagon participated in the rehearsal of the apocalyptic tropes of renewal that attempted to rerecord historical traumas as a past purification for the new White City. Cushing Davis notes that Chicago Day set attendance records at close to 750,000 people and focused on reviewing the history of Chicago from its “beginnings” where “the focus necessarily fell on the settlers most famous early encounters with Native Americans: the signing of the Treaty of 1833, and the massacre at Fort Dearborn” (38).<sup>182</sup> Just as the Columbian Exposition responded to an apocalyptic moment in US national history by reinscribing the origin story of Columbus’ apocalyptic vision, Chicago Day—“the greatest event in the history of the Exposition”—was to be an “announcement to the world that their city, a mere Indian trading post in 1812 and devastated by fire in 1871, had risen from the ashes to become a world-class metropolis” (ibid. 38).

Indeed, Cronon reminds that the “a mythic lesson that linked the Great Fire to the White City had less to do with destruction than with resurrection” (345). The morning after Chicago Day at the fair, the *Chicago Tribune* read “Twenty-two years ago Fire was the Victor. Over the ruins of a shattered city floated the red banner of the destroyer. Last night Chicago, risen from the ashes, made a servant of her conqueror” (“As Victor Over

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<sup>181</sup> See Pokagon’s essay “The Massacre at Fort Dearborn at Chicago, Gathered From the Traditions of the Indian Tribes Engaged in the Massacre and From the Published Accounts” first printed in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 98 (March 1899): 649-56. This essay reflects Pokagon’s desire to contribute to a fuller understanding of early Chicago history as “but one link in the chain of civilized warfare, deliberately planned and executed” (Low 46).

<sup>182</sup> On August 15 during the war of 1812, a settler outpost at Fort Dearborn was burned to the ground in a complete victory of the Bodéwademi. Native peoples, following Tenskwatawa the Shawnee prophet and brother to Tecumseh who prophesied the expulsion of American settlers, had a history of allying with the British to block American expansion. The battle was alternatively referred to as a massacre by those on the American side who saw the deaths of two women and seven children as justifying that nomenclature. It is generally agreed that the Bodéwademi were acting in self-defense, responding to a violation of a nation-to-nation agreement, and acting against a US agent seen as a traitor by the Bodéwademi band.



Fire” 3). Not only did the *Tribune* invoke a history of nationalist conquest in its “made a servant of her conqueror” line, the entire article makes clear that Chicago Day was meant as a city-to-nation apocalyptic allegory. Chicago Day and its historical recreations represented to the city what the fair illustrated nationally—a new beginning out of the ashes of apocalypse (ibid. 38). In these and other treatments, Chicago Day was narrated as an illustration of the blessing of a clean-slate out of catastrophe, a civic model of Turner’s immunological thesis (Cronon 346).

Chicago had seemingly quite literally “risen from the ashes” of 1871. However, the Jeremiad’s apocalyptic influence—where ashes signify repentance, sacrifice, and purification—were most heavily resonant in the historical events commemorating the brutality of the 1812 battle at Fort Dearborn which “continued to capture the imagination of Chicago’s residents, the Fort an enduring symbol of tragedy to overcome” (ibid. 38).<sup>183</sup> Thus, the ashes of the 1871 fire became a symbolic blessing, rewriting (and thus purifying cultural memory of) what was a clear Indian victory in a 1812 battle that occurred less than a mile from the Fair.<sup>184</sup> Another rewriting of Fort Dearborn was cast in stone: a monument to the battle was erected on June 23, 1893, only 19 days before Turner gave his thesis (ibid. 39). Fittingly, and somewhat ironically given the losses incurred by the American side, “the story of the incident at Fort Dearborn would be told and re-told, becoming a sort of creation story for the city of Chicago” (ibid. 37). As far as creation stories go, this was depicted as a particularly bloody one. The Chicago Daily Tribune’s

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<sup>183</sup> For more on the apocalypse’s debt to the Jeremiad within the American democratic tradition, see Sacvan Bercovitch’s *American Jeremiad*.

<sup>184</sup> The estimate of distance between the locations is based on research that places the battle at the site of what is now the Michigan Avenue Bridge, less than a mile from the site of the Fair. See Musham, H. A. “Where Did the Battle of Chicago Take Place?”. *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*. 36.1 (March 1943): 21–40.

headline on the morning of the Chicago Day celebration read “AWFUL BAPTISM OF BLOOD: First Terrible Event to Bring Chicago into Public Notice” and concluded, quite dramatically, that the city “which in 1893 is the wonder of the world . . . came before civilization with its swaddling clothes splashed with blood” (ibid. 39). Standing in the very place where his people had suffered apocalyptic dispossession, in a moment where that dispossession was being rewritten as the White City’s rebirth, Pokagon was asked to present a deed to the city, reenact his father’s 1833 Treaty signing, give an address, and ride on a float celebrating Fort Dearborn in the parade.

Pokagon’s contributions were more multifaceted than a mere sign-off on the sanitized narrative of apocalyptic renewal enacted by Chicago Day’s historical pageantry (which is unfortunately repeated in scholarship that reduces Pokagon’s participation to an uncomplicated endorsement of assimilation). Truthfully, Pokagon’s address on Chicago Day was a dramatic softening of the cutting rhetoric in the birch bark “Rebuke.” However, his speech must be understood in its relationship to the more acerbic message of his booklet, which further highlights the ways the oral version has been even more tempered by selective reprints of his words. Even scholars who desire to focalize Pokagon’s agency have offered quotations of his speech that omit portions that suggest more complex relations with American expansion.<sup>185</sup> While a definitive account of Pokagon’s speech is difficult to authorize, an example of this can be found in Cushing Davis’ reading of Pokagon, which contrasts his address and his printed “Rebuke” in an effort to highlight “the subtext of power, agency, and resistance” in Pokagon’s rhetorical choices (33). However, Cushing Davis’ well-intentioned account emphasizes his

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<sup>185</sup> Cushing Davis offers a comparative reading of a frequently cited portion of Pokagon’s address, contrasting it with the printed “Rebuke” in an effort to highlight “the subtext of power, agency, and resistance” in Pokagon’s rhetorical choices. For more, see Pokagon’s full speech in Wiatelec, et. al.

assimilation rhetoric in her selective quotation. In contrast, the full portion of Pokagon's speech reads (with the material Cushing Davis quoted in bold):

If any of you, my countrymen, feel the sting of regret because your rights have been ignored in taking part in the World's great Fair until now, **I beseech you to lay aside all bitterness of spirit**, and with hearts so pure and good that these noble mothers and daughters that have so labored in our behalf for this may rejoice that the kind seed they have sown has not fallen on dry and barren ground.

Let us not crucify ourselves by going over the bloody trails we have trod in other days; but rather **let us look up and rejoice in thankfulness in the present, for out of the storm-cloud of darkness that is round about us we now see helping hands stretched out to aid and strengthen us**, while above the roar and crash of the cyclone of civilization are heard many voices demanding that to the red man justice must be done.

The question comes up to us again and again, "What can be done for the best good of the remnants of our race?" The answer to me is plain and clear, and it matters not how distasteful it may seem to us. **We must give up the pursuits of our fathers. However dear** we love the chase, we must give it up. **We must teach our children to give up the bow and arrow** that is born in their hearts; and, in place of the fun, **we must take the plow and live as the white men do.** They are all around about our homes.

The selections with ellipses above are exemplary of well-meaning scholarship that emphasizes a speaker resigned to his own extinction, or coerced (willingly or not) into simple assimilationist progressivism.

When read in its entirety, Pokagon's speech leverages audience expectations with subtle criticisms that are more overtly bitter in his booklet. He opens his speech by linking his people and settlers as "countrymen" but also acknowledges that some "rights have been ignored," a statement of unharmonious unity that Pokagon continues after acknowledging US settler "hands stretched out to strengthen us."<sup>186</sup> Pokagon follows the paternalistic "hands" metaphor with "above the roar and clash of the cyclone of civilization are heard many voices demanding that to the red man justice must be done." In this, Pokagon insists on a difference between the riotous melee of civilization and the

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<sup>186</sup> All quotations of Pokagon's speech come from the full version printed in Wiatelec, et. al.

persistent desire to help Native peoples, allowing for the audience to ally with the latter. Then, he links civilization with the white man, who has swallowed up the “great West” to warn that white men “are all around about our homes.” Here, Pokagon deploys an apocalyptic warning of devastating floods, cyclones, as well as renewal only after establishing a shared concern for justice with the audience. Instead of a simple assimilationist speech, his participation at the fair is more justly seen as a performative version of the x-mark, a signature of Native assent that Scott Lyons shows signifying both lack of agency *and* agency.

As further proof of this performative complexity, most of the attendees could not hear Pokagon’s speech because of the lack of amplification technology. While there is no way to know if Pokagon intended his speech to incite interest in his birch bark booklet, his speech sparked a surge in curiosity and his book became a huge hit at the fair and with collectors (Low 46). The discrepancies between his oral and written versions can attest to a speaker who consciously engaged the expectations of his audience. As his appearance at the fair catapulted him to fame, more white Americans read his “Rebuke.” Pokagon’s presence was, in Low’s words, “the conscience in the ear of the hegemon,” a conscience that spoke both within a setting of ongoing apocalypse and through the tropes of the apocalypse genre (37).

### **Pokagon’s Apocalyptic “Rebuke”**

My central aim is not to rescue Pokagon from his perplexing politics, but to recognize how, acting within a context of historical and ongoing apocalypse, Pokagon’s “Red Man’s Rebuke” leveraged apocalyptic tropes to confront and contest the violence of white possession at work in the genre. While there is no evidence that Pokagon heard

Turner's Thesis, we can safely assume that Pokagon was well aware of the tropes that Turner solidified into his "Frontier." Pokagon's birch bark text of the "Rebuke" begins with a metaphoric union that both repeats and ruptures the conflation of nature with Native in Turner's thesis. The text begins with a two couplet poem: "Shall not one line lament our forest race, / For you struck out from wild creation's face? / Freedom—the selfsame freedom you adore, / Bade us defend our violated shore" (233). Declaring his "forest race," had to "defend our violated shore," the text links his peoples' identity to the land itself, and asserts their collective body violated (233). This beginning echoes Turner's conflation of Native peoples with the frontier, but the link pushes westward expansion back to its Eastern beginnings—landing it on "the violated shore." Moreover, if Turner conflated Native peoples with the frontier in order to narrate the disappearance of both, by moving the origin of colonization back to the eastern shore of Native land, the "Rebuke" reminds readers that the frontier myth originates in the foreignness of white invasion. The notion of original territory, a land for a people (which is so vital to the consolidation work of apocalyptic narratives), is here rewritten to affirm Native sovereignty as geographical allegiance of peoples, winds, and waters.

Further, the text leverages the notion of freedom implicit to frontier mythology to signal native precedent: the exact, or "selfsame," freedom that supposedly compels westward expansion is what enjoined American Indians to defend themselves against violations perpetrated by settlers. In short, "Rebuke" argues that Native peoples were the first to enjoy such freedom, acting to defend their lands against apocalyptic dispossession by the "pale-faced race" (233). In his first two sentences, Pokagon not only extends the rhetoric of American frontier freedom to refuse the logic of westward expansion, but he

also declares “to you, the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands, and homes, that we have no spirit to celebrate with you the great Columbian Fair” (ibid.). He continues, “NO; sooner would we hold high joy day over the graves of our departed fathers, than to celebrate our own funeral, the discovery of America” (ibid.). Pokagon opens his address by repeating an ecological Indian trope in order to refuse the territorial claims and the celebratory “origin” so vital to the American apocalypse genre. In the spirit of apocalyptic revelation, the funeral ashes of Native peoples and land are revealed to be the fertilizer of American origin myth.

Where Turner regarded the (contradictorily “closed”) territory of the frontier through the scientific distance that the Census offered, Pokagon’s rebuke roots his apocalypse narrative in the stability of his people’s land, as well as in its history and ongoing violence of dispossession. The “Rebuke” reminds readers that “Where these great Columbian show-buildings stretch skyward and where stands this ‘Queen City of the West’ *once* stood the Red Man’s Wigwam; here met their old men, young men and maidens; here blazed their council fires” (ibid.). Here, the fair’s celebration of Columbus is only the most current performance in a longer history of Native governance and kinship. The “Rebuke” continues: “Here was the center” where “roamed vast herds of buffalo that no man could number, while moose, deer and elk were found from ocean; pigeons, ducks, and geese in near bow-shot moved in great clouds through the air, while fish swarmed our streams, lakes and seas close to shore” (ibid.). The text refuses the countable nature of Turner’s Census logic through descriptions that emphasize the innumerably abundant nature of pre-“pale-face” life. Further, the text insinuates that the disappearances of the buffalo, moose, deer, elk, pigeons, ducks, geese, and fish were

victims of either the weakness or the insatiable nature of the pale-faces who “came by chance to our shores, many times very needy and hungry” (ibid. 234). By rooting such apocalyptic losses in the history of Chicago’s land, and linking loss of human to loss of non-human life, Pokagon insists on a different order of territorial stability.<sup>187</sup> In contrast to Turner’s possessive frontier, Chicago for Pokagon is an enduring actor and itself a victim of dispossession.

Moreover, where Turner uses the frontier to mask apocalyptic racial anxiety, the “Rebuke” exposes that racial fear as motivated by “pale-face” desire for capital accumulation by way of resource extraction. In contrast to logic that claimed *terra nullius* to justify dispossession, Pokagon writes,

To repay us they robbed our homes of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters; some were forced across the sea for slaves in Spain while multitudes were dragged into the mines to dig for gold and held in slavery there until all who escaped not, died under the lash of the cruel taskmaster [...] Our hearts were crushed by such base ingratitude; and, as the United States has now decreed, ‘No Chinaman shall land upon our shores,’ so we then felt that no such barbarians as they should land on ours. (233-34)

This passage’s assertion that the settlers “robbed” his people denounces a concept of possession assumed to be primarily white: to be “robbed” means that one must first “own”—a notion of Native possession reinforced by proprietary language of “our shores.” Further, this passage connects the theft of Indian families to environmental exploitation and the slave trade. In this tie, the text crucially extends a critique of the structural violence of white possession to the nonhuman. The text implicitly refuses the nomenclature of “natural resources” by paralleling “robbed our homes” with “land on our shores,” a parallel that makes land home, and home in the land. The text then ironically

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<sup>187</sup> Indeed, the “Rebuke” is exemplary of what Low sees in Pokagon’s bands’ continued legal fights for land and recognition: “the exploitation of nature *and people* is an undercurrent throughout the narrative of the Pokagon Potawatomi land claims” (71).

juxtaposes the “ingratitude” his people experienced to the hypocritical racial anxiety now fueling US immigration policy.<sup>188</sup> Further, calling settlers “barbarians” inverts the notion of savagery associated with *terra nullius* to assert the barbarism of theft associated with settler colonial America. The text refuses any attempt to separate settler colonialism, commodity fetishism, and racism. Indeed, in Pokagon’s “Rebuke,” they are inextricably intertwined and mutually constitutive.

Insisting on the links between white possessive sovereignty and settler-colonialism-cum-capitalism, the “Rebuke” uses language that redefines the “growth” anxiety that Turner inadvertently included in his quote of Calhoun. Growth, for Pokagon, signifies a deadly insatiability associated with white sovereignty, nothing but “wanton wholesale butchery” and disease (237). The text’s beginning portrays the settlers as the violating bodies, an inversion of the immunitary logic of health found in Turner and a redeployment of the colonial trope of clearing the land through an emphasis on disease (Manjikian 245). Pokagon rebukes the “strengthened settler” in Turner’s history by declaring the invasive, pale-faced settlers as infirm. He insists that instead of the sanitized growth of Turner’s thesis, the pale-faces bring “unhealthy, filthy habits” which teach “little children to hunger and thirst after the father and mother of palsy and cancer” (237, 238). The “growth” of America in Pokagon’s “Rebuke” is more analogous to a deadly tumor, a growth that will eventually consume itself.

Further, Pokagon’s “Rebuke” invokes the biblical roots of the apocalypse genre to reverse the cannibal trope in colonial discourse, depicting settlers as cannibals. Here, Pokagon joins a long pan-Indian tradition of drawing on the Christian rhetoric and

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<sup>188</sup> The decree quoted here is in reference to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which was extended in 1892 for another ten years (Pokagon 239).



repurposing it. With language alluding to Exodus and Revelation, the text draws the settler-cannibal analogy through apocalyptic symbols of the plague: “locust-like, they swarmed on all our coasts: and like the carrion crows in spring, that in circles wheel and clamor long and loud, and will not cease until they find and feast upon the dead” (233). The locusts and plagues of the apocalyptic books of Exodus and Revelation swarm like the crow’s carrion in Pokagon’s reprisal—where the carrion’s dead flesh or the carrion crow’s symbolically function as a messenger of death to liken the arrival of European settlers to apocalyptic origin (Exodus) and annihilation (Revelation).<sup>189</sup> While Exodus is Israel’s origin story of dispossession, Revelation details the judgment day of its titular apocalypse. Pokagon’s “Rebuke” redefines the act of dispossession central to the book of Exodus as Native dispossession, and prophecies the eventual restoration of his people through judgement against the pale-face apocalypse.

More importantly—and especially clear for the Anishinaabeg peoples who read the text—Pokagon’s depiction of settler destruction refracts biblical and settler apocalypse through the Anishinaabeg figure Windigo, a monster known for its insatiable and cannibalistic appetite. According to Kimmerer and others, Windigo is the legendary cannibal monster that can inhabit the body of a human or an animal, and is a name for anything that “cares more for its own survival than for anything else” (305). Some scholars, as Kimmerer notes, have speculated that Windigo mythology spread quickly “when overexploitation of game brought famine to the villages,” making a clear link between Windigo stories and uncontrolled resource consumption (304). Windigo has been a central figure in many Anishinaabeg artists: writers like Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, and Basil Johnston, and filmmaker Danis Goulet. Pokagon’s “Rebuke” exists in

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<sup>189</sup> See footnote 8.

a long line of Anishinaabeg intellectual production that recognizes Windigo in the pale-face hunger after “palsy and cancer.” Kimmerer re-phrases Pokagon’s “palsy and cancer” as compulsive overconsumption to remind us, “It is the Windigo way that tricks us into believing that belongings will fill our hunger, when it is belonging that we crave” (308). Pokagon’s cautionary Windigo tale not only bends biblical apocalyptic rhetoric back on itself, by drawing on the tradition of Windigo stories, the “Rebuke” recognizes the colonial trope of cannibalism to be more aptly descriptive of the colonizers themselves. Here, he centers Anishinaabeg tradition as the interpretive lens through which apocalyptic prophecy is most visible.

Beyond predicting the cancerous future of pale-face “growth” through biblical and Anishinaabeg traditions, the “Rebuke” contains a temporal paradox that contests the “firsting” in American national origin myths. First, the opening refuses the “firsting” in Turner’s Native/nature frontier origin story. Further, the “Rebuke” refuses the fair’s celebration of Columbus as heroic originator by offering an alternative historical account:

Your own historians, and our traditions, show that for nearly two hundred years different Eastern powers were striving for the mastery in the new world, and that our people were persuaded by the different factions to take the war-path, being generally led by white men who had been discharged from prisons for crimes committed in the Old World. (235)<sup>190</sup>

Contrary to the discovery of the New World credited to Columbus and his attendant apocalypticism, this locates the origin of such “discovery” in conflict between criminals. Additionally, the text entreats the audience to “read in your own histories” about early figures like William Penn who “made treaties with nineteen tribes of Indians, and, that

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<sup>190</sup> The footnote to this portion of Pokagon’s “Rebuke” states that Pokagon cites from “Columbus’ widely published letter of 1493.” However, there is no clear indication as to what portion of the sentence references Columbus’ letter, nor what specific letter the footnote intends (one can perhaps assume it is the letter of “Columbus to Luis De Sant Angel Announcing His Discovery” though that letter bears no explicit relation to this particular sentence in the “Rebuke”).

neither he nor they ever broke them; and further, that during seventy years, while Pennsylvania was controlled by the Quakers, not a drop of blood was shed nor a war-whoop sounded by our people” (235). Using settler history, the text refuses any origin story that champions the greed of criminals or asserts the inevitability of violence. Using settler history to confront the US settler state with its own violences is familiar and long standing rhetorical strategy in Native intellectual production, found forcefully asserted in early writers such as William Apess, Cherokee removal petitions and letters, and later nineteenth century writers like Sarah Winnemucca. Pokagon’s refusal of the origin myth of US history has its beginning in Anishinaabe traditions and a broader tradition of Indigenous countertexts that have refused such “firstings” since those beginnings began.

Ultimately, the text rebukes the “lasting” in Turner’s evolutionary apocalypse and offers an alternative extinction-story by prophesying an end to white man’s rule. The text rebuffs attempts to sanitize settler colonial violence through the rhetoric of science: “in answer to our complaints we are told that the triumphal march of the eastern race westward is by the unalterable decree of nature termed by them ‘survival of the fittest’” (237). Pokagon refutes that settler-science by declaring “the ‘fittest’ in his kingdom, shall be those alone that hear and aid his children when they cry” (237). Here, in Berliner’s words, the text recoded the scientific paradigm, “redefining biological fitness in terms of social responsibility” (74). In place of Native extinction, Pokagon prophecies a time beyond the US settler state when an “innumerable multitude” will rise up – further deploying the language of incalculability that evades the Census-logic on which Turner depends. At the same time, the text ruptures a historical arc implicit in the American apocalypse tradition that assumes an assimilationist end in white national utopia. In this,

Pokagon's apocalyptic narrative asserts the survival of his people. In contrast to Turner's use of the mythology of American apocalypse to invent a "new history," Pokagon uses settler accounts to both recount the apocalyptic violence of American history and to prophecy a time beyond settler-colonialism - a rhetorical move consistent with Anishinaabe oral migration stories that tell of new people emerging out of interaction, diversity, and continual movement (Lyons 4). In testament to that migration, Pokagon's prophecy, too, changes its Christian mythological context to envision the end of pale-faced rule but refuses the racial panic underwriting Turner's which persists in fears of white genocide today by fixing whiteness to criminality, not population.

Pokagon projects a reckoning with the violences of colonial conquest and a new beginning through the origin story of Exodus, the lamentation and prophecy of the Jeremiad, and Revelations' end of the world.<sup>191</sup> Beyond the locust-like analogy, the "Rebuke" also replaces the white-washed assumption of what constitutes God's chosen people: "our inheritance was cut off, and we were driven and scattered as sheep before the wolves" (234). Here the text evokes Exodus, the origin story of biblical apocalyptic legacy where God's chosen people suffer through dispossession and dispersal, but the text reveals the chosen people to be Native. Reinvigorating the prophetic arc of the Jeremiad, the text rewrites the Edenic fall as facilitated by "the hard cider of the white man's devil, made from the fruit of the that tree that brought death unto the world ... came like a serpent in the form of a dove" (235).<sup>192</sup> The correlation between colonization, introduction of alcohol, and the fall from grace is sustained in a Jeremiad-like invective

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<sup>191</sup> In this, Pokagon continues a strategic alliance with the Western Christian tradition began by his father.

<sup>192</sup> Jeremiah is a prophecy that arcs over both Exodus and Revelation by telling of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, the possibility of averting the destruction with repentance, and the eventual restoration of the Israelites.

that posits white colonizers as serpent-like, a demonic contrast to the innocence of God's chosen Native peoples. Most significantly, following the Jeremiad and the Book of Revelation's pronouncement of Judgment Day, the text concludes with a prophetic "Rebuke."<sup>193</sup>

Pokagon turns to a third person ventriloquization of God's divine prophecy. He writes:

Sons and daughters of the forest, your prayers for deliverance from the iron heel of oppression through centuries past are recorded in this book now open for me, made from the bark of white birch, a tree under which for generations past you have mourned and wept. On its pages have been recorded your history. (237)

Alluding to the "revealed" book of Revelation, perhaps even directly to the "the little book which is open in the hand of the angel" in Revelation 10, Pokagon goes on to employ the tropes of Judeo-Christian apocalypse to prophecy the end of white-man's rule and the revelation of Native survival beyond that time. "That innumerable multitude" of Native peoples will "appear like some vast sea of wounded birds struggling to rise" and the "Great spirit will speak with a voice of thunder to the remaining shame-faced multitude" (237). The prophecy then enacts Judgment Day, charging white men with "butchery," "filthy habits," "abominations," "deceit and trickery, cheating and robbing" and when "the great work of redemption had just begun, and some in faith believed, you then and there stuck out your sign, Sample Rooms" (237-38).

The prophecy takes the audience through these criminal charges to the resulting judgments with the rhetorical device of anaphora (commonly attributed to Western sermons but found in many other oratory traditions): it restates "I find you guilty" and pronounces prohibitions through the repeated "Neither shall you" (237-38). The prophecy ends with "I shall forthwith grant these red men of American great power, and delegate

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<sup>193</sup> See footnote 10.

them to cast you out of Paradise, and hurl you headlong through its outer gates into the endless abyss [...] shut out from my presence and the presence of angels and the light of heaven, forever and ever” (238). As a text first handed out at the white gates of the Exposition, the concluding lines pronouncing the eternal damnation of white invaders are unmistakably apocalyptic. The gates of heaven, under the force of the “Rebuke,” became the gates of hell, which are then extended to the gates of the White City.

The text’s prophetic affirmations of a time beyond settler-colonial time must be read in the context of Anishinaabeg oral migration narratives and the seven-fires prophecy, which envision the emergence of a new people out of the ashes of the arrival of others. Lyons notes that migration is an enduring value for Anishinaabeg people that regards the new as “merely another stopping point in a migration that is always heading for home, always keeping time on the move” where movement is “in fits and starts, with false beginnings and many fulfilled endings, always looking to both past and future, always producing diversity” (10, 13). Seen in this context, the past and ongoing violences recounted in Pokagon’s “Rebuke” are just a false beginning in the migration homeward. In Anishinaabeg tradition, the migration homeward is marked by a new people who stand at a challenging crossroads with a sacred purpose: “The people of the Seventh Fire do not yet walk forward; rather, they are told to turn around and retrace the steps of the ones who brought us here. Their sacred purpose is to walk back along the red road of our ancestors’ path and to gather up all the fragments that lay scattered along the trail. Fragments of land, tatters of language, bits of song, stories, sacred teachings” (Kimmerer 267-68). Seen in the context of the Anishinaabeg prophecies, Pokagon’s “Rebuke” is a model of this sacred path. “Rebuke” takes what may seem like fragments of religious and

cultural traditions, disintegrated through displacement and violence, and binds them together in a material that is both a fire starter and a medicine: birch bark.

Pokagon's "Rebuke" performs a type of sovereignty that exceeds the territoriality and temporality of white settler possession, articulating instead responsibilities that are in excess of even Pokagon's own actions. As Kimmerer explores, sovereignty for Anishinaabeg is both a political structure and a verb that require active responsible being, reciprocation, and gratitude (111-113). Kimmerer uses the Onandaga protocol "Words That Come Before All Else" (anglicized as the Thanksgiving Address) to exemplify a "statement of sovereignty, a political structure, a Bill of Responsibilities, an educational model, a family tree, and a scientific inventory of ecosystem services. It is a powerful political document, a social contract, a way of being" (115). Here, Kimmerer extends Native intellectual and political traditions of sovereignteies not built through territory but through affirmation of relationships to human and non-human peoples, not mythologized through "history" but continually reaffirmed through tradition and action. Following Kimmerer, Pokagon's rebuke should be understood in a tradition of sovereignties articulating outside of the Western liberal tradition. The text and speech reclaims the genre of apocalypse, stakes out an imaginative territory as much as it reterritorializes his people's land and survival. In that, it offers a model written in action and relationship, even failed and fraught ones, just as much as it is in birch bark.

Despite or perhaps because of Pokagon's complex political history, his apocalyptic "Rebuke" forwards an alternative conception of sovereignties outside the confines of Western settler sovereignty. It offers an important historical example of what Kevin Bruyneel calls the "third space of sovereignty," a space that recognizes how

Indigenous political actors work across and against the spatial and temporal boundaries of American colonialism, offering an alternative to the two “false choices” of independence and assimilation. While Bruyneel does not examine Pokagon’s performance in and around the White City in his study of the post-colonial third spaces of sovereignty following the civil war, Pokagon’s rebuke is exemplary of what Bruyneel theorizes, which is “neither simply inside nor outside the American political system but rather exists on the very boundaries, exposing both the practices and the contingencies of American colonial rule” (xvii). In theoretical, performative, and material ways, Pokagon’s apocalyptic narrative exceeds the settler apocalypses of present assimilation or historical erasure, presenting “a third alternative to ‘civilized Indians’ under government control within the fairgrounds and the ‘savages’ of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show playing just outside the Exposition” (Low 62). Instead, the “Rebuke” deploys the genre to imagine an end to colonization, narrate a future for his people and for the land, and imagine a territoriality and temporality before and beyond the rapacious and diseased apocalypses of American settler sovereignty.

It is more accurate to place Pokagon’s “Rebuke” in the long line of Native contestations to frontier mythologies that it emerged from and inspired. Just eight years after the fair, Pokagon’s son Charles continued to assert his band’s ownership of the lakefront—organizing an “invasion” of the area in 1901 and an occupation of Lincoln Park in 1903 which then inspired two other occupations in 1922 and 1928 (Low 76). Today, Pokagon remains vitally relevant for contemporary scholars and activists, offering what Low deems “an inconvenient truth” to the US settler state—a fitting, if perhaps unwitting, evocation of Al Gore’s climate change documentary. Though most readers of Pokagon,



or Low's analysis, might not be looking for it, the "Rebuke" provides an early example of intersectional critiques of the causes of climate change. Through the text, the "Rebuke" connects slavery, mining, the endangerment of "toiling bees," and hypocritical immigration policies to the ravaging of the land (236). In total, these consequences constitute what the "Rebuke" describes as slow sea level rise, as "the incoming tide of the great ocean of civilization rises slowly but surely to overwhelm us" (237). In this, Pokagon and his "Rebuke" present an early example of what Potawatomie environmental philosopher Kyle Powys White's work demonstrates: that the dystopic realities of environmental crisis have been experienced by Native peoples for hundreds of years—and that Native peoples have been and continue to be political actors in a space that is both inside and outside the reach of the US (2).<sup>194</sup> Powys White could be seen as part of a long historical line including Pokagon that narrates not the myth but the apocalyptic realities of colonization, past and ongoing. Understood through the lens of the apocalypse genre, Pokagon's "Rebuke" anticipates the inextricable dystopic realities of settler-colonialism, capitalism, race, and environmental crisis.

### **The Paradoxes of Settler Apocalypses**

Pokagon and Turner's orations-turned-print should be read as exemplary cases of the capacity of the apocalyptic genre. Both texts were presented in a place architecturally and ideologically structured to cement the consolidation of whiteness against threats to its territorial expansion and racial identity. Taken together, these texts reveal the apocalyptic genre's political exigency as it fortifies a people and a territory suffering threat of ruinous dislocation, in order to promise future redemption. Both texts showcase the value of

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<sup>194</sup> While this chapter uses Bodéwademi to indicate Simon Pokagon's people, it remains loyal to the spelling that Powys Whyte lists for his people as "Potawatomie."

apocalypse narratives to secure an exception in the face of “old structures and belief systems being overturned,” while taken together in the American context, both texts show American apocalypse to “bring together two competing narratives about American identity—the narrative of American exceptionalism and the reality that it is not” (Manjikian 158, 54). Apocalypse narratives do not look to mitigate or reverse the upending of “old structures and beliefs” but rather confirm the exceptionalism of its people through such change.<sup>195</sup> Yet, even the exceptionalism of the American apocalypse genre contains its own contradictions.

This exceptionalism highlights two paradoxes seemingly internal to the apocalypse genre: one of territory and the other of temporality. The genre is intimately tied to its territorial edges, edges that demarcate its chosen community awaiting the redemption assumed in the genre (Katerberg 36). Yet, threat of displacement—whether past, present, or future—is a vital attendant to the genre’s tension. Territory is the central anxiety of apocalypse: “At its core, apocalyptic literature is about dispossession, powerlessness, being afraid or in fear for one’s life” (Manjikian 27). Immanent to apocalypse narratives is this territorial paradox as a genre narrating a people bound together by a stable territory, who suffer under the threat of dispossession. By establishing this apocalyptic crisis, the territorial boundaries of the exceptional and redeemed people are continually reasserted and confirmed.

The genre’s paradoxical territorial crisis is as much a part of the settler colonial politics of apocalypse as is the genre’s temporal contradictions. The genre’s people are

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<sup>195</sup> Indeed, Manjikian’s study of the inalterable trajectory of the apocalypse focuses on how apocalyptic language does not look to mitigate or reverse the upending of “old structures and beliefs” but rather confirm the exceptionalism of its people through such change. The genre promises its people that the “success of their aims will lead to total liberation or regeneration of their societies” (Kumar 218).

always under threat of future catastrophe but are made secure against such threat through the generic arc of the narrative. Further flexible, the threat of apocalypse can be historical or future, while the narrative itself can begin, and begin again, on any number of places on the apocalyptic storyline.<sup>196</sup> Thus, the apocalypse genre narrates, “the vague grumblings and grim presentiments of a culture perennially fixated on the chances of its own demise” (McMurry 2).<sup>197</sup> As a narrative of transformation and transcendence, this elasticity is part of what Kermode credits with apocalypse’s “extraordinary resilience”: that the narrative is always having to be revised because time discredits it (8). The resilience that Kermode notes in both religious and secular apocalypse genre rests in this temporal and territorial contradiction: a chosen people defined by territorial boundaries face a disaster of dispossession, the occurrence of which warns of destruction with the hopes securing a purified, Edenic future.

In the US context, both apocalyptic literature and settler white sovereignty share these two paradoxes. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by an anxiety regarding dispossession, weakness, and fear of retribution, characteristics that also describe how the status of white sovereignty in the settler-state. Moreton-Robinson shows that these anxieties typify the ideological, material, and discursive reproduction, maintenance, and investment in the nation as a white possession (139). Where territory is concerned, apocalyptic appeals depend on an eternally fixed claim to land and the constant threat of traumatic dispossession. Similarly, settler white sovereignty ironically claims ownership

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<sup>196</sup> Though apocalypse “stands outside of time, outside of history,” according to Louis Parkinson Zamora, it also confronts “the full implications of man’s ‘fall into time’” (3, 97).

<sup>197</sup> In his work “The Myth of the Apocalypse and the American Literary Tradition” Zamora notes “apocalyptic literature is concerned with this relationship of man to temporal reality not only as it *is* but as it *should be*” (97).

over Indigenous lands at the same time as it fears the loss of the lands it claims to own. Further, texts that make recourse to tropes of apocalypse regard territory in a past, present, or future, of dispossession. The genre narrates a future end of the world to secure its people's survival through it, showcasing the temporal contradiction implicit in the genre. In parallel form, the white sovereignty of the US nation-state is secured by inverting settler violence onto landscapes bloodied from Native savagery against settlers. The future of settler white sovereignty is thus under constant threat of retaliation for their unacknowledged brutal past. US national identity, a nationalized version of settler white sovereignty, relies on the tropes of apocalypse to narrate the possibility of future crisis in order to secure settler exceptionalism and offer redemption for the past and present settler sovereignty.

When read in the context of Western sovereignty, the apocalypse genre reveals itself as a manufactured form of discourse used to consolidate power over a territory, usually by those already in power. The genre's central characteristic is a catastrophic, end-of-the-world event that secures, or reestablishes, the exceptionalism of its people. In this, the genre and its constitutive crisis can be understood as a discursive technology of Western sovereignty. The crisis central to apocalyptic narratives is akin to a state of emergency, a declaration that is used as rationale for suspending rights and freedom. Simply put, when pivoting around an emergency event the apocalyptic arc mimics the structure of western sovereignty. Through a narrative of past, present, or future apocalyptic events, the genre can function like a state of emergency, a state of exception that political theorists specializing in Western sovereignty like Giorgio Agamben (drawing on Carl Schmitt) and Native Legal scholars like Robert A. Williams, Jr. show is

constitutive of Western sovereignty.<sup>198</sup> For these and other scholars, Western sovereignty is defined by its exceptionalism, seen through the ability to suspend law or to declare a state of emergency that justifies deprivation of civil and political rights. As Roberto Esposito notes, the State of Exception, or exceptionalism that constitutes Western sovereignty offers a type of immunity associated with Western politics.<sup>199</sup> This immunitary function is clearly at work in Turner’s apocalyptic “Thesis.” However, as Pokagon’s “Rebuke” shows, the apocalyptic genre can be leveraged to secure a “third space of sovereignty” that is neither outside nor inside the reach of Western definitions of territory and time. Thus, the genre can work for or against the “normalization of the state of exception” that, in Agamben’s formulation, reduces life (bios) to bare life (zoe). The genre can subvert Agamben’s “logic of the camp,” refusing the boundaries of internment, territorialization, concentration camps, and genocide (Spanos 192). If apocalypse regards the end of a world in order to secure a stable future one, Turner’s thesis offers a territoriality and temporality that attempts to secure the permanence “embedded in claims of proper ownership” but fails (O’Brien 98).

Just as Patrick Wolfe emphasized settler colonialism as a structure, not an event, so too, apocalyptic stories must be structural. When focalized around an event,

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<sup>198</sup> Carl Schmitt’s endorsement of sovereignty as the *Nomos of the Earth* cites the beginning of (Western) sovereignty in the colonization of the Americas, where “empty space” becomes the *nomos*, or original spatial ordering, of modern political law remade in declarations of the state of exception and emergency (98-99). Giorgio Agamben, Robert A. Williams, Jr., Achille Mbembe, and Michael Dillon all draw on Schmitt to expose how the state of emergency is used to suspend civil and political rights, exposing Schmitt’s universalization of a state of emergency to functions through political exclusion, genocide, geopolitical inequalities, and biopolitical security practices. Synthesizing these thinkers, we find what Mbembe termed “necropolitics” is, in Dillon’s work, “the emergency of emergent life itself” which governs western security politics’ inherently antithetical orientation to radical political change (7). The state of emergency is a *terra nullius* creator, a land clearer, and a settler-as-*sacer* maker.

<sup>199</sup> Much can be said about the immunitary function of apocalypse genre and its relationship to the State of Exception and the State of Emergency. For further critical theoretical work on immunity see Roberto Esposito’s *Bios* and Jacques Derrida’s *Rogues*. More importantly, scholar Mark Rifkin brings this theoretical field into conversation with the status of Native peoples in the US.

apocalyptic appeals repeat the exceptionalism inherent to white settler colonial apocalypses (narratives and real). However, Pokagon's rebuke provides an early example of the ways the language of apocalypse can be--and is being--used to rupture those power differentials. Kyle Powys Whyte reminds us that Native communities in the United States and Canada already live, "what our ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future" ("Our Ancestors" 207). Nick Estes echoes Whyte in his book *Our History is the Future*, tracing the ways Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been responding to and surviving apocalypses that took the form of small pox (64), the river trade (93), and dam projects like the Pick-Sloan (134). These specific iterations are inseparable from the structures of settler capital, not one-time events that can be bracketed from historical and political context.

Apocalypse must be treated as Estes and Whyte do, who join Grace Dillon, Cutcha Risling Baldy, Zoe Todd, Lawrence Gross, and others who all use apocalyptic language to frame the settler state not through singular emergency episodes but, in keeping with Patrick Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism as a structure not an event. Gerald Horne traces the origins of *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* in seventeenth century slavery, white supremacy, and capitalism--the same structures that Jodi Byrd describes as transiting in apocalyptic terms (228). These thinkers all emphasize that Indigenous peoples are experienced survivors of an apocalypse of settler colonial capitalism that is ongoing. In this, they echo many Black and ethnic studies scholars who articulate settler colonialism as a set of apocalypse-inducing technologies aimed at dispossession which communities of color have been outlasting for centuries (la

paperperson, *A Third University*, 10).<sup>200</sup> Though the settler form of the apocalypse genre is limited to a linear end of a (white) world event, apocalypse can frame futurity and futurisms within and beyond the structural context of the settler state. They move our imaginations through, and indeed beyond, the whitewashed horizons of settler time and space.

Reading the “Rebuke” and the “Frontier Thesis” as apocalypse narratives reveals that, “white colonial paranoia, injury, and worrying are inextricably tied to an anxiety about dispossession,” but that anxiety is one that indigenous sovereignties continues to shape and disturb (Moreton-Robinson 152). Taken together, these two texts highlight the ways in which apocalypse is mobilized to secure settler white sovereignty, as with Turner, as well as how the genre can be leveraged to contest and survive beyond settler temporality and territoriality, as with Pokagon. Further, reading the texts alongside one another showcases how the genre can be utilized to imagine permanent futures for life outside settler colonial structures of racial and environmental exploitation. Thus, though the American apocalypse genre possesses intimate ties to imperialism, discourses of Western sovereignty and American exceptionalism, through Pokagon the genre also promises profound political capacity to refute or contest those hegemonic narratives.

Thus, we should not necessarily reject the genre's use, but parse the divergent uses to which it has been put. These writers unveil the problem of possession (and dispossession) functioning as a central coordinate in the genre, which allows for the ways the genre may be deployed to unite, disrupt, or alter those systems. The genre has the potential to unify a national identity, challenge the nature of that nation's unification, or

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<sup>200</sup> See King's work and Sinker's claim that the “Apocalypse already happened: that (in Public Enemy's phrase) *Armageddon been in effect.*”

offer alternatives to the unified conception of “US” sovereignty assumed in the genre. It can be used as an oppressive tool of settler colonial hegemony or a radical means for communicating alternative histories and forwarding revolutionary futures, even amidst untold climate-change. Through the generic tropes of apocalypse, wielders of the narrative can establish a state of exception that secures against crises, be they territorial, racial, or associated with contemporary and historical environmental justice. Thus, while the genre does not “admit of correction, mitigation, or reversal” the fact that the crises are “immanent” rather than “imminent” should give us pause (McMurry 17). Apocalyptic narratives function as a warning that when apocalyptic appeals rely on the state of emergency, they reinforce the sacred sovereignty of white settler environments.

### **Environmental Apocalypse**

The whitewashing function of the apocalyptic state of emergency is especially relevant to the imagining of climate change. The exceptionalist, state of emergency obsessions often found in environmental apocalypse stories remain dangerously wedded to the structures of power responsible for global warming, and lurk in scholarship that lauds the genre as a vital tool in narrating environmental crisis without acknowledging that the apocalypse is born from the colonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric Western literary tradition which Amitav Ghosh reads as the lead in *CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism*'s tragedy. As a way to redress the failure to address or even envision climate change (which he terms *The Great Derangement*), Ghosh calls for more collective catastrophism in our narrative imagination. In this call, Ghosh ignores his own concerns for the history of colonial capitalism and tacitly dismisses the trenchant critiques of the politics of collapse and climate change (55-56).



For scholars of disaster capitalism, the apocalyptic story of cataclysmic events is a conservative power consolidator, a profit generator. Catastrophism's critics have similarly warned that its primary mode is fear, which "is not a stable place to organize a radical politics, but it can be a very effective platform from which to launch a campaign of populist xenophobia or authoritarian technocracy under the sign of scarcity" (Yuen 20). Indeed, the singular catastrophe narrated in many apocalyptic narratives is easily made into a profitable ideology for global capital. Slavoj Žižek follows Naomi Klein to warn that, "global capitalism exploits catastrophes (wars, political crises, natural disasters) to get rid of 'old' social constraints and impose its agenda on the 'clean slate' created by the disaster" (Žižek 329). Where state of emergency claims are mobilized they typically further displace marginalized communities, fueling colonial capitalism first by destruction and extraction, then by "clean slate" claims that justify "rebuilding," cementing, whitewashing, and then selling off stolen places. They thus repeat a settler-cycle through present and projected catastrophe that both conceal and provision the racialized violence and environmental extraction necessary to US settler capital consolidation.

If apocalyptic narratives are to fruitfully frame the environmental imagination, they must radically interrogate what apocalypse tales index: namely the racial and environmental extraction veiled in the histories and myths of settler colonial capital. Instead, we can attend to the radical pun emergent in Lawrence Buell's characterization of the environmental apocalypse as a "master metaphor." As history shows, apocalypse can reveal or uncover the legacy of conquest inhered in apocalypse narratives, can unveil the whiteness of the master often rooted in the metaphor.

Attention to the function of the event in the American apocalypse genre shows that invocations of apocalypse typically regards the unsettling end of a (white) world. There, they reveal that what Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* deemed American literature's literary whiteness--where whiteness is consistently, invisibly, implied--applies to invocations of apocalypse beyond the literary to the "white-world-making" that George Yancy traces in western epistemologies and social structures (10).<sup>201</sup> Ultimately, stories that narrate environmental catastrophe as single state of emergencies fictionalize a structure of lived experience, fetishizing a temporality of the event and a territory limited to the spaces of property.<sup>202</sup> In that, these stories enclose us in CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism's choking atmosphere. They naturalize the atmospheres of settler colonial capitalism as seemingly ubiquitous, like the air we breathe. When stories remain inside the logics of settler colonialism suffusing our social relations, what Kristen Simmons calls these "settler atmospherics," they make histories of power irrelevant. They arrest our imagination with claims that climate change will supposedly be like nothing we have ever experienced before, disregarding the many who already trouble to take breath.

While Simmons does not explicitly connect her term to climate change, her concept emphasizes the importance of what Kyle Powys Whyte's work synthesizes. Whyte cites Daniel Wildcat, Leanne Simpson, Robin Wall Kimmerer and others who show that Native peoples' experience with and survival through what many would classify as the apocalypse includes their forced removal to locations with drastically different weather patterns - which meant encounters with changed climates ("Indigenous Science (Fiction)" 226). Settler colonial capitalism has been and is being experienced as

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<sup>201</sup> In his unpublished dissertation, Taylor McHolm draws on Yancy's term to describe an "inverse albedo effect" as the ways the Anthropocene reflects whiteness. McHolm, "Representational," 115.

<sup>202</sup> See Lohman, "Fetishizations of the Apocalypse."

climate change, as settler atmospherics suffuse our social and material relations with violently diverging degrees of constricted capacity - lungs, hearts, imaginations.

The suspended animation of settler state(s) of emergency that played out Standing Rock and Malheur - where settler states of emergency suspend or postpone the end of white sovereignty - reveal whole worlds of both literary and lived apocalypses. Those places help us see how the mode of apocalypse structures our traumatic realities and how it can be used to help us imagine worlds more just, more abundant, and more resurgent than our own. By regarding genre as both ideological and material, we are able to better address the shared nature of what some have deemed a contemporary “crisis of imagination”—what Frederic Jameson and Amitav Ghosh, respectively, have referenced as the supposedly pervasive failure to conceive the end of capitalism or the full implications of climate change. We can articulate how genres can be used to variously encode and inscribe or challenge and unsettle the authority of settler colonial capitalism’s racial hierarchy and environmental exploitation. Such attention to the material and historical politics of literary genre attunes us to a structural critique of the settler state(s) of emergency that constitutes a state of emergence for antiracist environmental imaginations, narrative and otherwise.<sup>203</sup> In this way, narrating climate change may not be about what kind of story frames we use, but whether or not they make clear the atmospheres, structural and systemic, that we are all differently in relationship with. Because we are all, all of us, in relation. There is no outside. There is just through and beyond.

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<sup>203</sup> The language of emergency and emergence takes inspiration from the 2018 American Studies Association conference theme, “States of Emergence,” that stresses possibilities for creating more just worlds in response to crisis.

Rather than the fiction of the event, attention to the structure of settler colonialism as a past and ongoing set of apocalypses emphasize the truths that we are all located in relation to those structures. Recognizing that means acknowledging that we can, are, and have been acting within those structures. As Elder Standingby says in the documentary *Denying Access: NoDAPL to NoNAPL*, the violences and disregard for treaty rights on display at Standing Rock were familiar. So, too, Indigenous resistance. And, he reminds, because it is nothing new means that there is nothing to fear. What we learn from Pokagon, Standing Rock, and the long, uninterrupted traditions of Indigenous resistance is a form of radical apocalypse that situates past, present, and future disasters within a space-time continuum of revolutionary survivance. In his new book, *Our History is the Future*, Nick Estes shows that “Indigenous resistance draws from a long history, projecting itself backward and forward in time” (Estes 18). In what Estes calls “Indigenous time” there is no separation between past and present, which means that the future is dependent upon our understanding of the past.

Conceiving this continuity across time and space, author of *M Archive: After the End of the World*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs explains it in terms of “black feminist time travel.” Gumbs describes a time and space continuum where those seeking social justice today draw on the strength of people like Harriet Tubman, who used her imagination of the freedom that many experience now to survive and free others. Gumbs and Estes describe a continuance encapsulated in Fred Moten’s insistence that what “survives dispossession, is therefore before dispossession” (241). In the midst of the simultaneous apocalypses of settler colonialism, Moten’s words resound with a chorus of multitudes living and imagining outside of settler space-time. Survival here, there, everywhere, then,

must be filtered through what William Lempert terms, the “generative hope of the post-apocalyptic present” (202). While the settler form of the apocalypse genre is typically limited to a linear trajectory involving the end of a (white) world, the mode can reflect and radically transform lived realities, can move our imaginations through, and indeed beyond, the whitewashed horizons of settler time and space. Ultimately, it can help us see that just as pipelines connect the gendered and raced violences of settler capital accumulation, so too they connect anti-colonial movements in an “infrastructure of Indigenous resistance” (Estes 58). In the arc of apocalypse, then, prophecy becomes a chant that reverberates across time and space, from the Jeremiad of William Apess through the revelation of Pokagon, to the chorus of voices in support of Standing Rock “‘Tell me what the prophecy looks like,’ we chanted. ‘This is what the prophecy looks like!’” (Estes 14). When we attend to the material of literary genre, we see literature has immense power for shaping not just our imaginations but also our realities. ‘This is what the prophecy looks like!’” (Estes 14). When we attend to the material of literary genre, we see literature has immense power for shaping not just our imaginations but also the lived realities of those at Standing Rock and elsewhere, and in movements inspired—given breath and life—by them.<sup>204</sup>

The apocalyptic rhetoric of Turner and Pokagon reveal important discursive techniques of power that continually come to bear in our contemporary political, racial, and environmental quagmire. The paradoxes internal to the apocalyptic genre hold a

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<sup>204</sup> This recognition is the foundation of what Detroit based community organizer, science fiction scholar, and “How to Survive the End of the World” podcast host, adrienne maree brown calls “genrecide”—the intentional blurring of fictional boundaries that shape our worlds (163). In his critique of environmental apocalypse discourse, Frederick Buell agrees that to blur “the boundaries between the dilemmas in fiction and dilemmas still very much in progress in the surrounding world” is one way to affect a more just and sustainable world (322).

striking parallel to contemporary environmental crisis and activism. Imagining action in the present, amidst apocalyptically charged climate change prediction of the future, takes great capacity for contradiction: to secure a future in which humans and other life can survive, to slow climate change, we have to imagine that the threats of climate change are so dire as to constitute the end of a world.<sup>205</sup> And yet, climate change is not and will not be a single catastrophic event. And apocalyptic renderings of climate change events have done little to mobilize populations, especially those with the most in common with the “us” of US settler sovereignty. Rather, environmental crisis has been and promises to continue to be experienced as a series of slow violences for those most vulnerable to, and mostly likely already victimized by, those often protected as exceptional.

In environmental apocalyptic appeals especially, catastrophe is often used to justify ongoing colonization of land, knowledges, and life ways, or justify killings of the most vulnerable peoples as necessary (or the killers exempt). In this light, deploying the genre to contest such exceptionalism seems increasingly vital. Where apocalyptic disaster events reinforce structures of racial violence and environmental destruction, radical stories of structural apocalypse can adjust our temporalities beyond the pale horizons built by settler colonial capital. Within such a continuum, a vibrant antiracist environmentalism exists that can be found before the beginning, and well after the ending, of what is currently called America.

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<sup>205</sup> In Slavoj Žižek’s enigmatic rendering of this paradox: “We should first perceive it as our fate, as unavoidable, and then, projecting ourselves into it, adopting its standpoint, we should retroactively insert into its past (the past of the future) counterfactual possibilities (‘if we had done this and that, the calamity that we are now experiencing would not have occurred!’) upon which we then act today. We have to accept that, at the level of possibilities, our future is doomed, that the catastrophe will take place, that it is our destiny – and then, against the background of this acceptance, mobilize ourselves to perform the act which will change destiny itself and thereby insert a new possibility into the past.” (151).

The first three chapters of this project attest to the vitality of genealogy as a method for interrogating the politics of literary genre for building anti-racist, anti-colonial environmental imaginations. Its genealogy is attentive to the political and historical significance of the gothic, national allegory, and apocalypse genres, the ways that each genre has been used to reflect, reinforce, or rupture the exceptionalism of white possession. The genrealogy modeled here shows that genre as an analytic facilitates its own undoing: revealing the ways literary genre may be used against the ideological frameworks implied in its generic assumptions. In other words, genrealogy suggests genrecide. This genrecidal work is the subject of the next two chapters.

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CHAPTER V  
GENRECIDE, SURVIVANCE ECOLOGY, AND AN INDIGENOUS POLITICS OF  
LITERARY GENRE

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“The literatures that American Indian authors produce disrupt and resist the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning generic conventions against affiliations”  
– Byrd, 346

As chapter IV demonstrated, Fredrick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis should be read as an apocalyptic story that narrated over the implicit contradictions between the spiritual values of nature as foundation for US democracy, the sadistic violences of settler colonialism, and the realities of a civilizing project that was running out of land.<sup>206</sup> In contrast, Simon Pokagon’s “Red Man’s Rebuke” testifies to the ways that Indigenous Americans responded to and survived the material and narrative endings of worlds in the moment they are being narratively formalized.

Likewise, writers like Ohiye S’a (Charles Eastman), Hum-Ishu-Ma (Mourning Dove), John Oskison, D’arcy McNickle, and John Joseph Matthews all continue the tradition to which Apress, Ridge, and Pokagon belong— using literary genre as a tool to contest the extractive stories and systems of the settler state. They suggest an anti-racist, anti-colonial environmental justice tradition exists in an Indigenous politics of literary genre—one that uses literary genre to kill the white possessive ideologies lurking in the

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<sup>206</sup> In his discussion of Turner, Nash Smith writes that, “in associating democracy with free land [Turner] had inevitably linked it also with the idea of nature as a source for spiritual values. All the overtones of his conception of democracy were therefore tinged with cultural primitivism, and tended to clash with ideas of civilization [...] Since democracy for him was related to the idea of nature and seemed to have no logical relationship to civilization, the conclusion implied by his system was that post-frontier US society contained no force tending toward democracy” (301).



American environmental imagination in ways as exigent to today as it was to each of the authors' own moments.

This chapter uncovers the ways that writers like Ohíye S'a (Charles Eastman), Hum-Ishu-Ma (Mourning Dove), John Oskison, D'arcy McNickle, and John Joseph Matthews all leverage literary genres closely tied to the tropes in Turner's apocalyptic thesis in order to imagine worlds outside the genocidal trajectories that codes white possession into our American environmental canon. If genrealogy highlights the relationship between literary genre and the white possessive environmental imagination, then these authors suggest an ecology of survivance through genreicide - literary genre as a tool to kill the white possession overdetermining American relationships to land and peoples. These authors continue a politics of literary genre very much alive in the nineteenth century, where genre is a tool for ending and imagining beyond the ecocidal and genocidal extractivist relations of the settler state.

Just as in the nineteenth-century, preceding, simultaneous to, and outlasting the white possessive environmentalism of the US settler state, twentieth-century Native American writers like Eastman, Hum-Ishu-Ma, Oskison, McNickle, and Mathews rewrote literary genres that scholars have directly tied to some of the most recognizable tropes in Turner's canonized history. Eastman turns to the religious genre of spiritual autobiography to expose the hypocrisies in U.S. settler colonialism's "righteous" civilizing mission as a regeneration through violence detailed in Richard Slotkin's book of the same name. Hum-Ishu-Ma, one of the first Native American women writers to feature female protagonists, uses literary genre as a tool for testifying to "how they had suffered as much from the pen as from the bayonet," a tool for contesting who and what

writes, and thus defends, the nation and its citizens (*Cogewea* 92). Through the Western romance, Hum-Ishu-Ma challenges the settler trope of an American democracy born of free land, a trope Turner turned into both a literal frontier and a figurative economics (both of which Henry Nash Smith linked to the costlessness of “virgin” land ). Instead, Mourning Dove reveals the violence inherent in the romantic western *indian* that feminizes, or makes “virgin,” territory available for settlement.

Both Oskison and McNickle use forms associated with U.S. national history to chronicle the violence inherent in the sacred imperatives of self-creation and self-renewal so embedded in American nation identity. These self-made imperatives are often associated with Ben Franklin but are also figuratively represented as “the colonist” in Turner’s thesis, a figure that Richard Drinnon has shown to be descended from a city-on-the-hill exceptionalism rooted in Puritanism and later translated into manifest destiny that extended settler ideology into the Pacific conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>207</sup> Oskison adopts the historical novel, a form Lukács warns can separate readers from contemporary historical forces, to do just the opposite - Oskison contests the self-creation myth of US settler historiography, using the form to bind readers to the complex and ongoing historical forces the form is meant to erase. Similarly, McNickle’s historical allegory uses the same structure as Turner’s frontiersmen, a metonymic allegory for the going-native myth foundational to US settler sovereignty, to place the contemporary historical forces of the book’s publication in a genealogy of US settler renewal through violence. Finally, working with the paradigmatic genre of subject formation, the

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<sup>207</sup> Drinnon explains how the biblical context of the City on the Hill (and Winthrop’s use of the term) serves as a reminder of responsibility and Christian charity, though it has more often been used as a way to bolster visions of manifest destiny. While not directly informing this essay, Drinnon extends Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* and Slotkin’s *Regeneration Through Violence* analysis of the myth structure that underlays Western expansionism from colonialism to Vietnam.

*Bildungsroman*, Mathews rejects the social world of development so central to Turner's evolutionary version of US national myth. These authors use Western genres most associated with whitewashing the coercive assimilation-or-extinction impulse of the U.S. settler state to remember literary genre as a tool capable of killing the "contagious trap" of "the mythology of white America" (Deloria, Jr. 33). Together, these authors suggest that an indigenous politics of literary genre is genrecidal - where the settler state's racist and extractive narratives are vulnerable, anxious, and able to be killed. This genrecidal genre-work is a site of survivance, a "kill the white settler story, save the world" literary mode that models the ways environmental artistic production, criticism, and activism must center Indigenous and anti-racist political movements.

Placing Indigenous theories of survivance into conversation with theories of the relationship between environmental ethics and literary genre, and taking a cue from Homi Bhabha, this chapter explores the ways an Indigenous politics of literary genre can be defined as a genrecidal survivance ecology. The genrecidal ecology of survivance that clarifies through these authors is capable of rupturing, remembering, and surviving beyond the death-drives of the US settler state. It performs what Bhabha defines as ruptures to the pedagogical function of national narrative.<sup>208</sup> For Bhabha, following Ernst Renan who says national myth relies on forms of forgetting, these narratives rupture

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<sup>208</sup> In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha notes national narrative represents the nation as a homogenous entity, where "[t]he scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects" (297). Bhabha insists that the nation-state pursues a homogenous identity by appropriating 'pedagogical' narratives of the past, in which the entire nation is unified by a common, exceptional history. Bhabha notes that the constitutive element for nation building is a process of forgetting, affirming Ernst Renan's famous claim that "Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation" (219). Bhabha builds off of Derrida's notion of the heterogeneous and supplementary in *Grammatology* to articulate how a rupture in the pedagogical is possible: "This supplementary space of cultural signification ... opens up - and holds together - the performative and the pedagogical"; "The supplementary strategy suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation" (305).

under the performative weight of the “heterogeneous histories of contending peoples” (212).<sup>209</sup> In his attention to the rupture, Bhabha aims to destabilize standardizing notions of the nation as a homogenous entity by exposing, or remembering, the various discourses that constitute the narrative strategy of the nation in continual slippage. The nation, he contends, is “*internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference” (212). Though the nation itself must appear uniform and thus can never recognize differences internal to its constitution, the texts discussed in this chapter exemplify how literary genre can be used to refuse such consolidation, to instead re-member the violences that national narratives like Turner’s thesis narrate into erasure. They show that literary genre can be used to work against the forgetfulness, the effacement, central to white settler innocence. The Indigenous politics of literary form that these works exemplify suggest an ecology of survivance in placing the political work of literary genre in the front and center, asking what literary genre endorses, refuses, extracts, or heals. It refuses the genocide necessary, but erased, in the unification of U.S. settler capital to instead suggest a genecide of the white possessive imagination, halting the drive driving our futures toward extinction.

### **Eastman’s Spiritual Autobiography**

Ohiye S’a, a Santee Dakota physician, prolific writer and national lecturer also known as Charles Eastman, attended to those harmed in the Wounded Knee massacre, witnessing firsthand the end-of-worlds that haunt the landscapes and redemptive rhetoric associated with Turner’s frontier. Published after Turner’s thesis began to take hold in

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<sup>209</sup> Of these ruptures, Bhabha writes: “Cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference itself” (313).

American national myth, Eastman's spiritual autobiography *From The Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* uses the language of righteousness, Christian assimilation, and conversion to expose the violence exemplified in Turner's anointed regeneration of colonial conflict. Eastman's text ironizes the conflation of the Christian spiritual values with US colonial imperatives, even in its title. The title appeals to the myth of a wilderness in need of taming, a myth that assumes a progress from the "savagery" of the deep woods to the "salvation" of the civilizing mission implicit in the colonial pastoral. However, Eastman inverts the most basic elements of this spiritual progression, exploding what Vine Deloria, Jr. calls the fusion of "religion and real estate" inherent – but ideally forgotten – in the doctrine of discovery and manifest destiny (105). Eastman's text exposes the greed and fraud fueling the property-as-religion conflation in U.S. settler imaginaries, morphing from the Columbus myth into Turner's secular motto for U.S. Empire.

The text echoes the *Bildung*'s novel of subject formation, but traces a spiritual education that exposes the abuses associated with US national identity. Its chapters recount his early education, childhood, college, professional life, political conflicts, and participation and observation of civilization "as preached and practiced." The chapters in the autobiography begin prior to settler civilization, with his education at home where he was initially trained "not to care for money or possessions" (1). This training is quickly juxtaposed with the first lesson he gathers from white civilization, that settler colonial property theft was the root of conflict: "The Americans pretended to buy the land at ten cents an acre, but never paid the price; the debt stands unpaid to this day. Because they did not pay, the Sioux protested; finally came the outbreak of 1862 in Minnesota, when

may settlers were killed, and forthwith our people, such as were left alive, were driven by the troops into exile” (3). Here, Eastman’s education originates prior to a settler colonial social, which is contrasted with growing knowledge of white civilization’s fraudulence, violence, and obsession with accumulation. Eastman contests Turner’s thesis, which displays a clear epistemology of ignorance as it chronicles a conversion where “at first the environment is too strong for the man” but the man “fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails.” In Eastman’s education about beginnings, the Sioux do not disappear but instead protest, resist, survive, and are exiled, all because of settler fraud. The text refuses the “white American creation myth” of Turner’s apocalyptic origin story (Limerick). Instead, Eastman’s text is marked in excess of such settler time - the chronicle bends past the assimilatory arc implied in the education of the early chapters through the “Nation’s Capital” all the way “Back to the Woods” to end with a philosophical and metaphysical commentary on “The Soul of the White Man.” The order of events, summed in chapter titles, exceeds the secular education into settler sociality and also transcends the metaphysical structures implied in the Christian religious rhetoric to which Eastman makes recourse.

Invoking the Protestant tradition of spiritual autobiography, the text explicitly exploits Turner’s contradictions. Eastman’s text follows the generic pattern of spiritual autobiography to invert the ideological assumptions within such hypocrisies as Turner’s “conversion call.” The genre typically begins with an individual’s sinful youth, chronicles their awakening when faced with the prospect of damnation, and relates the conversion that saves the individual from the anxiety experienced prior to their religious transformation. In contradistinction to the Western supremacy assumed in such an arc,

Eastman's "awakening" begins with his education in missionary schools, experiences that certainly confront him with his own damnation, but instead of learning how to be "saved," he begins to learn the "warfare of civilized life" (165). The crucial turning point in his spiritual development comes in his experiences at Wounded Knee, where Eastman found ghost dancers were "relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while feeling for their lives" (111). Eastman calls the trauma he encountered "a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man" (114). Indeed, the experience marks a counter-conversion where Eastman's assimilation into white Christian civilization is interrupted by the brutal hypocrisies of that national identity.

Eastman fully articulates his "conversion" at the very end of his autobiography. He confesses, "I have wondered much that Christianity is not practiced by the very people who vouch for that wonderful conception of exemplary living. It appears that they are anxious to pass on their religion to all races of men, but keep very little of it themselves" (193). Though Eastman is often read as an assimilationist, here he performs a different conversion call—a conversion of Christ into a Native leader. He calls his audience to practice the values of the "Christ ideal" that is "in line with most of my Indian training" (138). He then rejects what he calls the "machine-made religion" to declare instead, "Christ was an Indian" (141, 143). Ultimately, he resolves, "this nation is not Christian," but "the Christians in it are trying to make it so" (50). In this indictment, Eastman acts as a witness for a decolonial Christianity—one where "Indian training" discloses the hypocrisy of using Christianity to justify the violence of colonial civilization. Inverting the formation of a Christian subject, the text assimilates

Christianity to Indian-ness. His spiritual autobiography teaches the systemic and societal abuses perpetrated in the name of god and nation.

In this way, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* takes the tragic narratives of extinction and disappearance that attend the “closing” of the frontier, to reveal the racialized death-drive of settler colonialism. The text repeatedly exposes the imbrications of racial hierarchy, abuse of religion, and capital accumulation, even when ostensibly in the name of improvement or conservation. Eastman shows how farming (30), the creation of beautiful park systems (136), and the lumber kings (160) are all similarly symbolic of the “warfare of civilized life,” a extinction-driven teleology marked by a graft via religious abuses and legal measures like the Burke bill or Dawes bill (165, 164). It shows whiteness to be the motivating force behind the exchange rates of settler capitalism, where nature is broken up into by-products, and god morphs into a property that can be bought: “The white man had showed neither respect for nature nor reverence toward God, but, he thought, tried to buy God with the by-products of nature. He tried to buy his way into heaven, but he did not even know where heaven is” (149). Through the lens of religious education, the autobiography chronicles Eastman’s education in the abuses of people and nature, awakening to the ways Christian rhetoric masks the white capitalist extinction imperative.

The text does not reside in its conversion to a sort of tragic cynicism, however. It lifts up a more comic version of survival, a “progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency” as its closing lines state (195). This alternative vision of “progress” is exemplified by one of the primary symbols (and mechanisms) of Native disappearance: the buffalo. The buffalo may now be



almost inseparable from the famous 1870s image of two white settlers standing in front, and on top, of a mountain of buffalo skulls, an image that declares “victory” through genocide - of the buffalo and, by a sort of settler synecdoche, the plains peoples.<sup>210</sup> In Eastman’s account, the buffalo similarly signify first abundance then extinction as “the Indian and the buffalo still held sway over the vast plains” until “there is no more buffalo to chase” (6, 19). Later, the buffalo’s hides appear at Wounded Knee, on the bodies of the buffalo soldiers, soldiers of color whose military service perhaps promised them a sliver of agency in the white settler state.

These buffalo skins and soldiers signify the coercive reach of the U.S. military, where an animal so central to the survival of the plains people is used to clothe other victims of settler colonialism as they operate as tools of genocide. Yet, the buffalo emerges a final time, towards the end of Eastman’s story, as an indication of adaptation that precedes and outlasts colonialism. Eastman tells of Ojibways overcome in battle, “so disheartened that they then left forever behind their forest life and exchanged the canoe and birch-bark teepee for the Prairie and the buffalo” (173). These words evoke Eastman’s broader statement that “nations and tongues, as well as individuals, have lived and died” (69). Throughout the text, Eastman details the horrors of making people, land, and animal life into commodities as a kind of counting and accumulation that leads to extinction. But, the text goes beyond the tragic/extinction implicit in settler colonialism’s timeline to detail a comedy of survivance where Indians have been surviving, changing, and adapting before settler colonial Christianity and after.

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<sup>210</sup> Metonymy would seem a more accurate metaphoric term to describe the relationship between buffalo and plains people, as the buffalo were *associated* with the plains people, rather than a *part* of the whole. However, settler logic sees plains people as indistinguishable from a kind of “nature” that the buffalo paradigmatically signify. What’s more important, however, is that a relationship of synecdoche is more powerfully descriptive of the interdependence of plains and nonhuman peoples.

*From the Deep Woods to Civilization* acts as a conversion call from a tragic, consumptive “Christianity,” a monologic and “machine-made religion,” to a vision of “civilization” as comic adaptation and survivance. Eastman concludes with a vision of American civilization guided by an “Indian sense of right and justice,” where “the ‘struggle for existence’ is merely a struggle with the forces of nature, and not with one’s fellow-men” (187, 188). Throughout the text, Eastman wrests the rhetoric of “survival” from a social darwinism underwriting settler capitalism, and instead lifts up a comedic version of adaptation. When he concludes “Nevertheless, so long as I live, I am an American,” his assertion is full of the comic doubleness of the text’s entire critique (195). Indeed, Eastman uses the “I” as significant only for its implications for the “we,” unseating the importance of the individual in the spiritual autobiography and providing a communally comic mode of spiritual maturation.

The text’s survivance ecology rests in this comedic vision of the social and in the text’s regard for narrative as a political act. *Deep Woods* deploys the genre most associated with an individual’s education and spiritual enlightenment to unsettle the tragic “divinity” of the supposedly ordained exploitation and extinction imperatives associated with settler colonial conquest. It uses the language of Christianity, which entails a certain anthropocentrism that Lynn Whyte, Jr. famously and canonically linked to environmental degradation, but shows that language, and the genre of individual spiritual subjectivity, can promote nonhierarchical social modes that understand and comedically navigate the human and environmental impacts of settler colonialism (9, 20). In this, the text offers an interrogation into the type of *anthro* benefitting from supposedly universal notions of anthropological success. It uses the terms of Turner’s national

spiritual autobiography to refute its religious premises and its survival-of-the-fittest stories. Its survivance ecology makes survival sacred - before, through, with, and beyond the symbols, narratives, laws, and “histories” of settler colonialism and its environmental and racial exploits.

### **Mourning Dove’s Frontier Romance**

Eastman’s indictment of the nationalist and materialist violence of “Christianity” explains why many Native writers turn to the novel – a genre that Lukács claims is “the epic of the world that has been abandoned by God” (88). And there is perhaps no greater form of novel to parade the hypocrisies of Turner’s Frontier thesis than that of the idealized-frontier-driven Western Romance. Hum-Ishu-Ma’s (Mourning Dove, Okanogan and Arrow Lakes) novel *Cogewea The Half Blood* explicitly contests Turner’s tropes and the way they persist in the era of the novel’s publication (Piatote 108<sup>211</sup>).

Written between 1912 and 1927, the novel emerged with what Beth Piatote calls the “national symbolism and containment of indigenous economies”–the rise of western and romantic dime store novels that often base their heroics in Indian conquest, territorial and sexual, and the production and circulation of the buffalo head nickel, a symbolic effacement of the history of slaughter and removal of both buffalo and their Indigenous relations (ibid.). *Cogewea* takes the form associated with this moment, the western romance, but uses the form to interrogate the pedagogical imperatives of the U.S. settler state that are naturalized within the genre. Western romance typically regards the western setting as a symbol of freedom and opportunity for conquest and incorporation, both of land and of the Indigenous female body. Instead, *Cogewea* exposes the genre as a tool of

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<sup>211</sup> This novel was a collaboration with an Anglo-European translator that changed the text to such an extent that the credited author claimed it was no longer her story. This essay wishes to examine the politics of the form itself rather than the specifics of authorial intent, integrity, or indigenous “authenticity.”

white property accumulation based on Indigenous genocide and violence against women, and reveals this accumulation and violence to span the spectrum of U.S. settler political dispositions. The novel enacts a distinctly indigenous feminism that refuses the trope of “virgin” free land to be tamed into American democracy. The novel rejection of Turner’s “democracy born of free land” provides an important corrective to both the patriarchal white sovereignty implicit in settler capitalism’s Westward expansionism and white feminism’s historical dismissal of issues of race in the name of progress. Instead, the novel provides an Indigenous ecofeminist approach to survivance, an Indigenous, feminist survivance ecology.

The novel uses the paradigmatic genre of gendered conquest as an Indigenous feminist response that exposes the property logics underwriting the settler myth of free, virgin land as it persists in Turner. Indeed, the novel exposes Turner’s myth to be nothing more than a romantic veil for the surreptitious graft of conmen, the rapacious continuation of the “Pochantas Perplex” of patriarchal white sovereignty that persists even as the terms of such conquest shift from frontier violence to allotment and citizenship. In “Pocahontas Perplex,” Reyna Green sees colonial discourses’ representations of Native women as sexually available for white man’s pleasure by equating images of native female body with the conquest of the New World. The novel deconstructs this “Pocahontas perplex,” showing the identification of conquered indigenous female bodies with conquered land as a conflation motivated by greed that continues through to allotment. The Dawes Act ostensibly ended the “violence” of conquest in favor of individual private property allotments and citizenship, but, as Piatote shows, though the act prevented communal land holdings to pass “through women’s

bodies to their white male partners, it does nothing to protect the property rights of Indian women who held allotments” (95). The novel presents Densmore as the paradigmatic Anglo-Easterner, a settler colonist “confidence man” posing as a suitor for the titular mixed- blood Okanagon heroine of the novel, and a man whose land-lust is so overt as to render the Native-women-as-free-land fantasy of patriarchal white sovereignty a horrifying vision epitomized by his tying Cogewea to a tree once he realizes she is broke.<sup>212</sup> Through Densmore, the novel “aligns marriage rights with property rights,” and ties both to the ways the frontier hero and the virgin bride/land amalgam persist as narrative tropes used to dispossess, even as the terms of that dispossession have shifted from military conquest to private property (Piatote 95).

Yet, the novel also rejects any simple, non-intersectional feminism that may emerge in response to the landscapes associated with patriarchal tropography. Joanna Brooks details the ways that “its protagonist’s nearly homophonous name,” Cogewea, “suggests a critique of popular Sacajawea romance” that Brooks shows was popularized by suffragettes who used Sacagewea as an emblem of woman-piloted progress (2). Where Piatote notes that Cogewea could be understood as Q’wec’\_y’ea, the Salish term for “Chipmunk,” reading the novel’s heroin as homophonic analogy draws attention to the ways narratives of progress erase the histories of systemic violence repeated in such symbolic marshaling (Piatote 98). In this, Cogewea also offers an anti-romantic, anti-individualist and decolonial dimensionality to foundational ecofeminist scholarship such as that of Annette Kolodny and Kate Soper. Kolodny and Soper have importantly linked the myths of “*Paradise* with all her virgin beauties” to structures of rape - of land and the

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<sup>212</sup> Piatote sees this action as “an apt metaphor for the ways in which allotment connected Indian women’s bodies to land” (96).

female body (qtd. in Kolodny 171). *Cogewea* emphasizes the intersectionality latent in this early ecofeminist scholarship that shows the continued “association of femininity with naturally” is affected through the shared “perception of the colonizer” (Soper 139, 142). In *Cogewea*, the western frontier romance and its Turner-ian free, virgin land are tools of white male property accumulation, of settler colonial capitalism that cannot be reduced to a matter of the female vote, or any other marker of colonial progress that lacks analysis of the settler colonial timeline. Here, the novel shows the western frontier romance to be capable of not just exploding the set of narrative expectations associated with white male dominance but also those structures of oppression sometime inadvertently sustained by an analysis that regards patriarchy as something that can be disarticulate from racialization and economics.

The novel does not rest in this critique. *Cogewea* uses the narrative tropes associated with the western frontier romance to invert the tragic-comic expectations associated with the genre. Set against the landscapes of the Flathead (Salish) reservation of what is currently called western Montana, the novel shows the white western frontiersmen to be a narrative supplement to the weak and tragic figure who, according to *Cogewea*, kills that which was “considered too dangerous for white settlers” but which was never found dangerous “when we were here alone” (148). The native-disappearance upon which white settler masculinity is measured is here reversed *and* prefigured by Indigenous capability. More significantly, the novel ruptures the very sign that makes Western romantic tragic-comic expectations possible - where native tragedy is the precondition for the comedic resolution of marriage in the Western romance plot, both

depend on the ‘transit’ of what Gerald Vizenor calls the *indian*.<sup>213</sup> Vizenor’s concept of the “Indian” signifies a colonial invention, a tragic sign, and an artifact of the colonizing viewpoint (to emphasize the invented and anomalous nature of the word, Vizenor always keeps the word in lower case and italics). “The indian, of course, has no real referent,” he writes, it is “an ironic noun, a simulation of dominance that transposes native memories, imagic moments, and stories of survivance” (*Native Liberty* 162). The function of the *indian* is as a scapegoat with no referent other than sacrifice and violence (*Fugitive Poses* 31). Indeed, Jodi Byrd draws on Vizenor’s notion, and the work of Lisa Lowe who shows freedom to be constituted from the unfree, to trace the ways settler colonialism continues through the transit of Indians and Indianness (Byrd xxv). The *indian* is a colonial artifact of domination that transits through the romantic landscapes of Turner’s free, virgin territory.

*Cogewea* halts this transit and replaces it with a studied survivance. In the middle of the story, Cogewea is reading *The Brand*, a novel based in fabrications Jim and others have provided to the author/researcher. *The Brand* seems to be a typical “Indian” romance, a comic chronicling a “‘brave’” who curses his heritage, “weds the white ‘princess’ and slaves for her the rest of his life” (91). Cogewea sees the story as “interesting to the whites, [but] worm-wood to her Indian spleen,” drawing attention to the ways the comic wedding of whiteness depends on the enslavement of Indigenous peoples. After venting to Densmore and Jim about the book’s ridiculous and offensive message, Cogewea “found solace in consigning the maligning volume to the kitchen

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<sup>213</sup> Vizenor draws on Jacques Derrida “survivance” and Jean Baudrillard’s notion of simulation, using both to show how European colonialism has constructed and misconstrued the category *indian*, as a “colonial enactment” (*Manifest Manners* 11). Baudrillard uses the term simulacrae to describe the hegemony of artificial imitations of the “real” in late capitalist or mass media society.

stove” (96). Here, the *indian* inventions that inform *The Brand* cause Cogewea to deconstruct such vile inaccuracies to others (notably, to Jim who is the source of some misinformation and Densmore, who represents the prototypical perpetrator of such contrivances, viewing Cogewea as nothing more than “pleasing chattel”), and to destroy the representations in the fire. *The Brand* highlights that while the *indian* is an empty sign, it can give rise to alternatives for the “real<sup>214</sup>.” The *indian* in *The Brand* reminds Cogewea of “how her race had had the worst deal of every deal since the landing of the lordly Europeans on their shores; how they had suffered as much from the pen as from the bayonet of conquest” (92). Indeed, this analysis empowers Cogewea to not just burn, but *flip*, the script of the *indian*, a reversal made explicit when she accepts Densmore’s proposal but refuses his request as improper, telling him “If you are to play Injun, you must fall in line! There are no side trails” (235).

More still, the novel concludes with Cogewea’s rejection of Densmore in favor of a marriage to Jim, the half-blood cowboy from Flathead. In this, the novel exceeds the popular figure of the Wild West hero, expanding what Roderick Nash Smith sees as the figure’s flexibility beyond Nash Smith’s original claim that the hero only reconciles Turner’s contradictions.<sup>215</sup> As “a typical Westerner – a rough nugget – but with an unconscious dignity peculiar to the Indian,” Jim as frontier cowboy challenges the “savage primitivism” and the “civilizing” ideologies that gave rise to the Wild West figure initially (19). The novel shows “these ‘coffin-nails’ are of the white man’s

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<sup>214</sup> Vizenor rejects Baudrillard’s fatalism in favor of a “dialectical use of the term, [that] does not necessitate the destruction of the real (of, for example, tribal consciousness), though it certainly could do so” (Carlson 19). Vizenor shows *indian* is an empty sign that can give rise to alternatives for the “real.”

<sup>215</sup> Nash Smith argues that the figure of the Wild Western hero was flexible enough to act as both “the harbinger of civilization and refinement” and “cultural primitivist” (63).



inception” but inverts the signs of extinction, erasure, and tragedy into signs of Indigenous survival (121). *Cogewea* offers a potent indigenous feminist intervention into the gendered and raced pedagogies assumed in the Western romance, and points toward the performative possibilities of the genre for an Indigenous feminist ecology of survivance.

Using the terms and transits associated with settler colonial conquest, the novel suggests an explicitly feminist survivance ecology. As it rejects what Densmore lauds as “the discard of forgetfulness,” the novel reinforces the presentness of Indigenous peoples, who carry legacies of survival through the rapacious and gendered systems of land theft, allotment, and citizenship. The novel shows how the terms of settler colonial myth are, in Bhabha’s words, “internally marked” by contestation (212). The novel even uses the words of famous cowboy poet Badger Clark, who called Custer National Park his home, to declare “history is a tale” to further refuse Turner’s tropes as nothing more than a tall tale masquerading as history (55). A paradigmatic example of this performative rupture occurs in the chapter titled “4<sup>th</sup> of July” where, as Beth Piatote notes, the national celebrations allow for “the strategy of performing patriotism as a cover for maintaining traditional Native feast days and ceremonies soon became a tradition; dancing on the Fourth of July in particular was considered ‘much safer’” (114). In much the same way, the assumptions associated with particular genres like the Western frontier romance can be used to exploit the abuses and excesses of “the white man’s highest standards” to make space for the persistent and changing Native cultural practices (*Cogewea* 146). In this, the novel suggests that survivance ecology, a comic unsettling of individualistic extinction imperatives as they are expressed in literary genre, can forward survival

without overdetermining the complicated realities of how Native peoples should relate to western modernity (Brooks 8). Just as we saw in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, *Cogewea* declares “The day will dawn” when the worlds envisioned in the settler’s western frontier romance will set, out waiting those extinction imperatives and rewriting them for survival in the meantime.

### **Oskison’s Historical Novel**

As another iteration of the western, *Brothers Three* by John Oskison (Salish) is a sweeping historical novel that tracks the perils of expansionist “self-creation” logic so essential to the western genre, and to the nation itself. Through the western and historical novel form, *Brothers Three* exposes the systemic violence inherent in the settler colonial myth of self-creation and self-renewal, extending the violent history of “the western man on the make, the speculator, and wildcat banker” to before and beyond Turner’s thesis (Slotkin 5). Tracking the sons of Francis and of three generations, the events in the novel parallel, and in some ways mimic, the western frontier expansionism of Turner’s thesis through the Odell family and their family farm. In some ways, the seemingly “progressive” novel traces the stages of Turner’s developmental thesis quite closely.

However, the *Brothers Three* upends the idea of “immunity” that Turner found in his “going native” form of self-creation and shows the teleology implicit in Turner’s move toward transnational economic frontiers to be a form of sickness instead. Published in 1935, the novel takes as its heroic center a Native “pioneer” family in Indian Territory, itself an intervention into the western form, that highlights the “contagious trap” of “the mythology of white America” as an indiscriminate fever of speculation (Deloria 27). This myth of self-creation and unlimited prosperity is narrated as a frenzy that infects all three

brothers, causing them to risk the security of the family farm through speculations in symbols of expansionism: individual home ownership (70),<sup>216</sup> a farm store soon transformed to “Odell’s Cash Store” (96), railroads (103), automobiles (106), war (138, 148), town building (142), “oil leases, royalties, and wildcat drilling enterprises” as well as ore mining (260), planes (347), and, finally, the stock market (349). Where both Turner and the Western rely on a generic conquest of nature and the Native, the *Brothers Three* chronicles how that conquest mentality which desired to turn Native peoples into “citizen farmers” becomes the “corporate manifest destiny” that threatens, and ultimately must redefine, the ideal yeomanry *and* the transnational speculation of settler colonial logic (Vizenor *Native Liberty* 79; Drinnon 350).<sup>217</sup>

Oskison’s historical novel narrates the machinations theorized by Lukács’ *The Historical Novel*, complicating Lukács’ formative study two years before it was published. For Lukács, the historical novel offered new possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as historically conditioned. Where Lukács assigns to Sir Walter Scott the embodiment of a historical realism that displays the contradictions of history erupting within the plot, Lukács reads the American historical novel as exhibiting the same contradiction as American history itself: “the contradiction between an ideology based on the premise that all men are created equal and a political structure based on the assumption that people of color and white women do not fall under that rubric ‘men’” (xv). For Lukács, the American historical novel celebrated the triumph of technology

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<sup>216</sup> See Goldstein, “The Ground Not Given,” and la paperson, all.

<sup>217</sup> Slotkin sees the yeoman farmer, inspired by Jeffersonian ideals, as a new type of mythic hero that mediates between the civilization and savagery (21); Drinnon shows the ways this notion gets exported, persisting in the war in Vietnam, offering an example of a larger “transit,” to use Jodi Byrd’s words, that Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz traces, as she shows the ways the Indian wars function as a template for U.S. in the world (192).

advancing civilization over tribal society, not to reconcile the victor with the defeated (as in the Walter Scott tradition) but to justify the extermination of the vanquished race. If Lukács' assessment is correct, Oskison takes up the form predicated on native genocide, marries it to the other predominant mode of settler fantasy, the western, and uses both to narrate the contradictions that Lukács asserts signifies radical historical novels, but in a way that refuses the narrow politics Lukács associates with the American historical novel. Under Lukács' own rubric, Oskison should be considered the American Walter Scott whose potentially radical work, like Lukács' says of Scott, does not depend on the author's particular conservative politics (*The Historical Novel* 33). Moreover, as Joshua B. Nelson's reading of *Brothers Three* notes, the novel rejects the tradition-assimilation binary that seems to over-determine not just literary assessments of the novel as either an assimilationist or capitalist apologia, but shows the binary ultimately insufficient to explain "the story of the west" and its "pale parodies" with proper historicity (*Brothers Three* 56).

Indeed, Oskison's historical novel proposes an alternative genealogy that links such "pioneering" fervor to capitalist settler colonial conquest-relationships implicit in the US national myth of self-creation where "wealth became an index of sainthood" (Deloria 47). The novel begins in 1873, roughly a decade after the Homestead Act gave "free" land up under the principles of individual ownership and agricultural "improvement," and a decade before the Dawes Allotment Act that dissolved communal ownership of native lands through the same logic of self-creation through frontier taming. The novel historically traces the "change that was being wrought by the invaders of this Indian land, turning it from Indian serenity to white man turbulence," and extends over

sixty years, concluding contemporarily with New Deal policies of 1933-37 and the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (sometimes called the “Indian New Deal”) (54). The New Deal rejected the ideology of unlimited industrial growth as the remaining opening in Turner’s “closed frontier” and the Indian New Deal reversed privatized land-holdings and returned Indian self-government to the tribal level. The novel’s timeline spans the most dramatic political shifts for Indian, and US national, relationships to self-creation through land ownership, but does so in order to radicalize the politics of the “farm.”

Contrary to Lukács’ assertion that the post-1845 novel loses insurgency, the alternative history offered in *Brothers Three* radically troubles notions of “permanent plenty if the farms were neglected” (358). The novel tracks, in literal and figurative ways, how “War prosperity invaded the farm,” but concludes with a revolutionary vision of the individual farmer and private “ownership” that refuses an extractive, relationship with the land (138). The farm is recognized as “a living organism [...] nourished by the lives that are fed into it” and is the site of family renewal and regeneration that the novel resolves “is worth giving ourselves to” (448). In the place of a profit driven model of agriculture and speculation, fueled by the notion of *self-creation*, *Brothers Three* performs a radical rupture in the pedagogical individual yeoman ideal of US national myth rooted in the notion of “self-creation” and transplanted to transnational economic frontiers in Turner. Through the western historical novel, Oskison offers a genealogical interrogation into the crucial role that the national ideology of the self-creating individual plays in violent logics of western conquest beginning with the “agricultural, small-propertied economy,” and leading to the systemic violence of “industrialized capitalism” (Drinnon 334). The novel thus preserves a Lukács-ian anti-capitalist sentiment. However, it rescues the

historical novel from Lukás' de-radical, post-1845 indictment by tracking the insidious transformation of capitalism from a land based economy to the speculative stock-markets. It then proposes a local—and thus anti-national—kinship model that ruptures the pedagogical time of expansive national self-creation associated with the apolitical post-1845 novel. Even more, Oskison's novel occurs at a time when native lands were being returned to tribal governance, intimately tying the Odell family history to Oskison's political moment.

Through *Brothers Three* the historical novel emerges as a genre capable of the long view necessary to link particular notions of nature and land to the insatiable maw of settler colonial capitalism. *Brothers Three* subverts the ideologies assumed in the genres it draws on and offers a critique that not only indicts the plots of Turner's thesis, but anticipates the ways those plots get exported onto global markets. Moreover, the novel goes beyond a condemnation of the slow violence of what Marxist geographer David Harvey calls "accumulation through dispossession," it links the logics of "subduing the wilderness," settling Eden, and conquering the frontiers to a patriarchal history that exhausts one resource after another. Instead, the novel lauds an anti-essentialist notion of Cherokee identity that helps root an eco-feminist survivance in human and non-human relationships to place. As Nelson's tribally specific reading of the novel shows, the novel finds the women to embody connection to land, as Cherokee women historically managed all matters relating to agriculture, subsistence crops and the maintenance of home (651). Though, in Nelson's words, the novel does express "chauvinism almost comic in its thinly veiled sense of inadequacy and its wretched metaphor" (651). However, in the text that Nelson cites, it is hard to imagine the novel's chauvinism

indicates a straightforward endorsement of the language of male domination. The comic irony suffuses this speech with sardonic undercuts: “a man must take hold here who isn’t ruled by his women folks... You women call the tune, and it’s not vigorous enough to save what I’m thinking of the symphony of Under-Ridge Farm. You put in unrelated themes, jazz discords. It’s a mess. A man must re-orchestrate it, give it definite direction and purpose” (401). Coming at the end of an epic tour through the patriarchal “rationality” of the market order orchestrating downward mobility and purposeful precarity, this statement rings particularly satirical. The words seem symptomatic of a willful-male blindness which the novel assigns to patriarchal white sovereignty in all its capitalist transformations—including the racial transformations associated with assimilation.

Bleak satire overwhelms any uncomplicated endorsement of the patriarchal “narrative teleologies of white settler triumphalism” that regenerate through verbs like subdue, push, tame, domesticate, and conquer (Brown 295). Instead, the novel shows women to possess the temporal tempers adequate to the sweeping systemic critique possible in the historical novel, where “Subduing the wilderness, pushing back the frontiers, turning the wide prairies into farm homes was ‘old stuff’ to minds that, like Kathy’s, could see the long cycles of building of America only as episodes in movies, or read of them in romanticized fiction. Little of its sweep and significance had been conveyed by the history books, condensed and juiceless, used in the schools” (357). The novel suggests a matriarchal, land-based responsibility to community can emerge from a

sustained, historical critique of patriarchal white sovereignty.<sup>218</sup> The novel ends in such feminist survivance, where we learn to “say no, too, the way your mother can. We’ve got to listen to her from now on.” As the most aggressive of assimilationists in the novel resolves, “‘It all comes to this,’ Henry said after silence. ‘The Farm’s a living organism. It’s on starvation rations just now, but we’ve got to do better by it. It’s nourished by the lives that are fed into it’” (448). The novel concludes as the family resolves to give themselves to the farm, to become that which feeds the living organism of the farm. This conclusion is both an affirmation of a Cherokee “agricultural tradition that dates to time immemorial,” and a reversal of all of Turner’s extinction imperatives even the continuations of them in “history books, condensed and juiceless, used in schools” (Nelson 651). The novel shows the historical novel can undercut what the form seems to over-determine. *Brothers Three*’s emphasis on communal continuance, its refusal of the containment of individuality, and defiance of binaries of tradition/assimilation, Native/non-Native, victor/vanquished, and others, proves the historical novel capable of a survivance ecology that narrates complex changes in political and capital realities toward the continual survivance of Indigenous communities, human and non-human relations.

### **McNickle’s National Allegory**

Beginning in the hopeful New Deal decade in which *Brothers Three* concludes, Salish Kootenai D’Arcy McNickle’s 1978 novel *Wind From an Enemy Sky* tells a story of the Little Elk people, a fictional Northwestern nation, and the effects of a large dam project on their lands. As a historical allegory, it extends what Drinnon notes is the self-renewal trope from Turner’s thesis, a city-on-the-hill exceptionalism rooted in Puritanism

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<sup>218</sup> As Nelson notes, “the Cherokee mother Janet Odell first wields this authority, but, following her early passing, the role falls to Timmy’s wife May ... who is white but becomes acculturated to Cherokee surroundings much in the same way that Francis had before her” (651).



and later translated into Manifest Destiny, to expose exceptionalism as the rule governing the entire political spectrum of the U.S. settler state.

In analogous fashion, the book investigates the span of this murderous system through the ‘innocent’ “American Adam” figure, Adam Pell, and his dam(ned) building project. Through its nominal similarity, the novel links Pell’s projects to a colonial history that marshaled myths of the first “Man” to naturalize patriarchal white sovereignty and justify settler colonial violence and land theft. Adam Pell is the “engineer, industrialist, museum owner,” who serves the spectrum of extractive industries that profit white settlers— both environmental, the dam, and “preservational,” the museum (137). The dam, built under the bidding of white farmers on an area previously occupied by the Little Elk tribe, is the latest in a history of dispossession that includes Allotment and emerged in part from nineteenth century histories, as Shari Hundorf makes clear in her work on the politics of land in the novel (“Mapping,” 48). In Pell, “the biblical creation story in which Adam is given dominion over the earth” is inextricably linked to Pell’s dam project (ibid. 47). This dominion manifests as “surveying parties [that] came and drove wooden stakes in the ground,” cutting the land “into squares and rectangles by fence lines” (*Wind* 222). The novel invokes the biblical creation story so that Adam functions as an analogous *and* direct tie of Christian colonization and “the idea of the grid survey” to a history that “is peculiarly American” (ibid. 229). Despite the opposition to the dam, and Pell’s realization that the dam was “a kind of crime against life,” Pell persists with his project (210). It is, after all, how he makes his living. Beyond the pales of nineteenth century land theft, Adam Pell represents a range of settler state tactics of Native disappearance through dispossession, removed by or submerged under the divine

prospect(ing) of extractive industries for dams or for conservation, epitomized by Pell's museum's "care" for the Little Elk medicine bundle.

While the dam represents the dominion of settler capitalism, the bundle shows "preservational" imperatives to be of the same ilk of innocence. Just as the dam inundated a sacred site to the Little Elk, the sacred medicine bundle is taken to Pell's museum through "theft of both land and tradition" (Vest 61). Both represent the conscious grafting of the settler state, as "trustees" legally sanctioned as wardship (231). Indeed, the novel narrates Pell's realization of the violent history of thievery from, and murder of, indigenous peoples which is then traced to the Christian imperative to "*Multiply, and make the earth bear fruit*" that undergirded legal "remedies" such as the Marshall trilogy (190). Pell is indignant at the unjust legal history he uncovers, that "no compensation went to the Indians for appropriation of their property" (193). Ultimately, however, Pell not only loses the medicine bundle so sacred to the Little Elk people but offers "a gift to take the place of [it]," as if any "artifact" will do (255). His "original impulse to make amends by returning property he had no moral right to possess had come to nothing" - Pell is left as little more than an example of how "the white man never does anything bad, except by mistake" (215, 237). Just as *Cogewea* does not suffer the supposed well-meaning suffragettes who operationalize Sacagewea to lobby for the "progress" of white woman's right to vote, through Adam, *Wind From an Enemy Sky* calls out a particular "settler move of innocence" that indicts a liberal, but persistently colonial, left.

Specifically, the novel exposes the particular settler move to innocence that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call "*conscientization*" that is most typically associated with an

educated, liberal elite (19). *Conscientization* is, for Tuck and Yang, the process by which the cultivation of a critical consciousness “comes to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of returning stolen land” (19). Indeed, Pell is a prototype of this settler move, the “moral weakness” that “McNickle seeks to expose in liberalism” (Vest 51). For all his posturing, Pell never considers halting his dam project or turning the land the dam disrupts back over to the tribe. Pell’s *conscientization* – realizations and indignation – secure his innocence through a type of paralysis. His inability to act only leads to his death and the deaths of many of the central Native characters in the novel.

More significant than readings that locate *Wind*’s major message in the incommensurability of communication between the two cultures, the novel’s historical allegory clarifies that any lack of understanding between Native peoples and the settler state (and its representatives) is an interruption or frustration that allows settler moves of innocence to continue *uninterrupted*. Where allegory is thought to rely on a “fundamental distance from territory, history, and origins,” and was initially a method of colonization reenacting Columbus’ ritual of naming, itself an “extension of allegorical consciousness,” the historical allegory offered through Adam Pell exposes “settler innocence” as not just a historical phenomenon, but a continuous one—with very material consequences (Piper 81, 82). Instead, the historical allegory suggests a radical form of tribal survivance: land repatriation.<sup>219</sup> While in *Brothers Three* the New Deals held at least the possibility of returning land to tribes, *Wind* ruptures the renewal and recovery promises extended to Native American populations through Indian New Deal policies by exposing their genesis in non-Native mechanisms of control that go back to Christianizing missions and myths.

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<sup>219</sup> One of the most popular acts of the New Deal declared “income producing property to be managed according to principles of wise use for the benefit of the nation.” In response, *Wind* asks the question, “for *what nation?*” insinuating to readers the very real possibility of land repatriation.

Instead, the novel argues for actual repatriation—of sacred bundles and of land. In this way, its excavation of the murderous logic of the New Deal extractivism resounds across histories of resistance including Indigenous-led environmental justice movements today. The book insists that there is no difference in killing the water and killing Native peoples, for “Murder is not an isolated occurrence. It has its roots, its certain logic. Justice has the task of discovering that logic” (151). Indeed, those roots are historical and continuous. Jay Hansford C. Vest recounts the historical antecedents of the novel, Salish (Flathead) “removal from Bitterroot Valley and a series of dams build along the Mission mountains” (48). That history is reset in the New Deal era, a rewrite published in the context of the Alcatraz takeover and the occupation at Wounded Knee. This genealogy links historic removal to the persistent and continuous land rights movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In this, the novel shows historical allegory to be capable of decolonial time-travel. In her article “Ready Whites: Allegory in D’arcy Mcknickle’s *Wind From an Enemy Sky*,” Karen Piper draws on Frederic Jameson’s work on allegory to note that when forced into an allegorical narrative by the colonizer, the colonized may reappropriate this method of representation” (83). Piper’s argument, indicative of a late nineties postcolonial criticism that depends on the binaries of colonizer and colonized, thus leaves the complex imaginative possibilities of decolonization unexplored. However, Piper’s assessment of the ways the novel “creates its own allegorical narrative out of the ruins of western allegories about time and space,” perhaps can explain why most critics read the novel’s ending as just as puzzlingly hopeful in tone as it is tragic in conclusion. The novel’s last lines bleakly conclude, “*That day, the cry of the lover was heard*

*everywhere... Ke-ree, ke-ree, ke-ree. No meadowlarks sang, and the world fell apart*" (197). This line ends the novel's historical allegory in an evocation of the apocalypse. Yet, this apocalyptic appeal must be understood within the allegorical context of the story *linking* structures of removal and genocide across history. Indeed, the novel's last lines echo a passage of cyclical time in the beginning, "A time when a boy came... a time when the dawn lay in dampness... a time when a grandfather explained... a time when the plover cried and the song of meadowlarks wove the world together" (30). This suggests that within the space of a novel centering on the dam, the novel builds a bridge across time and space—Indian removal, allotment, assimilation, and removals for dams and national parks are all part of settler time and space, a death-drive teleology culminating in what Elizabeth Kolbert has called the sixth extinction, an apocalyptic end of world that concludes the novel.

Yet, the very nature of the historical allegory suggests a collapsing, a rewriting, an excess of that settler space-time that flings the reader back to beginnings. The opening lines of the novel, "The Indian named Bull and his grandson took a walk into the mountains to look at a dam built in a cleft of rock, and what began as a walk became a journey into the world" initiate a journey into a world of geometric lines, fences, exclusion, removal, and death. Thus, the last lines of the novel suggest that, just as Bull kills Adam, the historical allegory imagines a time when the world of Adam falls apart. Indeed, Bull, a man that "If it hadn't been for him, more of this Indian land would be in white ownership," is one person among many in a multiverse history of resistance across time and space (121). The last line signals the end of *a* world, and the beginning of another, with the question of what kind yet to be determined.

The novel's supposedly tragic end becomes a comedy of survival when viewed in the memory and futurity of the allegorical. As Bull tells his grandson: "Just the same, you will remember what happened today. After a while, you will understand it" (9). His grandson responds, "what can we do against these men who dry up a stream and make new rivers where none were meant to be?" (14). The novel answers—shoot at the dam, take it down, give back the land. The novel reminds us that fences can always be uprooted. The future is never foreclosed. Just as Historian Patricia Limerick shows "the frontier only closed when the Indian was turned into an artifact," the allegorical nature of the novel helps open imaginations to histories and futures that "even a strong wind from an enemy sky had to respect" (Limerick 56). When we remember the continuity between what happened and what is happening, we see an ecology of survivance embedded in the novel's use of literary genre. The allegory becomes realities. The Elwah and Glines Canyon Dams come down, we remember the Frontier was never closed. Decolonization is not a metaphor. Land can always return.

These texts heterogeneously testify to enduring people-land relationships and together suggest a continuous history of resistance in the face of the violences and changing mechanisms of the settler state. This continuance is the quiet, powerful, unmoving message of John Joseph Matthews' *Sundown*, a message that resonates with Indigenous led environmental justice movements in the twenty-first century and beyond.

**Matthews' Bildungsroman: Sounding Silence in *Sundown*<sup>220</sup>**

In 2013, a photo of twenty-eight-year-old Amanda Polchies at a Mi'kmaq anti-fracking protest in New Brunswick, Canada became iconic as a symbol of Indigenous

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<sup>220</sup> A version of this reading of *Sundown* appears as "Sounding Silence in *Sundown*: Survivance Ecology and John Joseph Mathews' Bildungsroman," in *Western American Literature* 53, 4, 2019, 439-467.

resistance to industrial extraction. The image draws power in juxtaposition: Polchies silently lifts a delicate feather before a hard horizon of Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whose humanness is lost in the line of force with which they mean to protect the interests of the oil and gas industry. The dissonance captured in this photo is disturbing but not unique. Recent images of militarized police blasting water cannons at unarmed water protectors at Standing Rock in sub-freezing temperatures also elicited shock and rage. Anger is justified. Surprise is not.

The use of excessive violence in the name of extractive industry is altogether foreseeable in the history of US and Canadian settler--Native relations (Brown). David Grann's 2017 work of historical nonfiction, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, reveals how settler desire for land and resources has always been deadly. Grann narrates the Osage Reign of Terror, a period in the 1920s when the Osage were poisoned, shot, and bombed for their headrights to oil-rich land.<sup>221</sup> Through Grann's deft archival scrutiny, *Killers of the Flower Moon* uncovers complex collusions between settler law enforcement, oil-industry tycoons, and white communities that seem eerily prescient of the riot-gear-clad police shielding the frontlines of settler capitalism today. Grann's narrative nonfiction details the historical backdrop of Osage writer John Joseph Mathews's 1934 bildungsroman *Sundown*. Both Grann's and Mathews's texts regard the Osage Reign of Terror as a gruesome example in a long history of structural violence linking the settler state to land theft and resource extraction. Still, *Sundown* offers a story of survival that

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<sup>221</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Osage County's oil-rich land came under the management of the United States Department of the Interior. In 1907 the federal government allotted 657 acres of land to each enrolled Osage, including headrights to royalties from oil production that could be inherited by their legal heirs (including non-Osage). By 1920, the Osage were wealthy. Then, in 1921, Congress passed a law requiring guardians to manage each Osage's royalties and finances. This "management" by white lawyers and businessmen often resulted in theft through marriage under false pretenses and murder.

goes beyond the tragic history of Grann's vital study to articulate--quietly, profoundly--with Indigenous resistance today. The novel stretches across time and space, silently testifying to an unbroken environmental justice tradition committed to Indigenous sovereignty and survivance.

*Sundown* forecasts the exhaustion of the settler-state's resource extraction, but navigates this time travel in an ironic vehicle. It prophesies the emergence of a different social world through the narrative genre most associated with the inevitable teleology of Western modernity, the bildungsroman. Also known as the novel of education, the bildungsroman is a genre bound to the rhetoric of the forward march of "progress," developing from its original landscapes in German romanticism's "melding primitive naturalism and German nationalism" to the ideologies of individual subject formation and social assimilation (Wimborne).<sup>222</sup> *Sundown* does follow an individual's formative psychological and social growth. However, instead of abiding by the conversational constraints often assigned to the bildungsroman, where talk functions as a sign of "development," *Sundown* shows the ways silence can both indict and outwait the genocidal logic of natural resource extraction and nation building.

The novel traces an Osage male, Chal, coming into adulthood following a typical bildungsroman arc. Chal is frustrated, alienated, and threatened by the abrupt (and murderous) transition into modernity precipitated by the discovery of oil on the Osage reservation.<sup>223</sup> However, instead of articulating with the classically assimilatory arc of the genre, *Sundown*'s bildungsroman uses silences to predict what Stephanie LeMenager

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<sup>222</sup> The *Bildungsroman* is frequently traced to the work of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, an early (if not founding) figure in German Romanticism (Jeffers).

<sup>223</sup> For more on the Osage murders and *Sundown*, see Carol Hunter's "The Historical Context in John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*."



calls “the last gasp of oil aspirations,” prophesying a time when the oil industry will consume itself. The novel’s silences stress and splinter US settler colonial capitalism’s seeming ubiquity, its invisibility like the air we breathe, exposing the violent pollutions of extractive, exhaustive, and exhausting modes of capital accumulation. In *Sundown*, silence is more than just a powerful marker of acquiescence to a culture of violence gasping for short-term gain. Silence can signal the refusal to be speechless, refusal to be unheard, refusal to go away. In this, silence in the novel articulates resistance to, and resilience through, the white-world-making of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism’s choking atmosphere.<sup>224</sup> *Sundown* imagines beyond toxic environmental atmospheres to a time and a world where a feather can stop a bullet and a silence can speak when words are insufficient.<sup>225</sup> We need *Sundown* now more than ever.

Silence in *Sundown* articulates an Indigenous-centered anti-capitalist environmentalism. First, *Sundown* complicates the genre, specifically the settler nationalist expectations of conversation and comedy embedded in the bildungsroman. The novel demonstrates through Chal the ways individual silences index the coercive Euro-American bildungsroman’s speech imperative. However, it also offers alternatives in the many divergent silences in the novel—the eloquent, sacred, and ecological silences of both characters and text—as they quiet the fever pitch of extraction moving murderously through the novel. *Sundown* argues for survival through the most arresting silences in the story, those resounding in the landscapes of the nonhuman, in order to

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<sup>224</sup> George Yancy studies western epistemologies and social structures’ “white-world-making” (10). In his unpublished dissertation, Taylor McHolm draws on Yancy’s term to describe the ways the Anthropocene reflects whiteness.

<sup>225</sup> Native peoples are still killed and incarcerated at some of the highest rates of any population in the United States and Canada.

theorize a mode of survival rooted in more-than-human worlds. In its cacophonous but nonverbal conclusion, the novel's silences suggest an ecological mode of survivance transcending generic constraints.

The novel's silences challenge a US national narrative, and a European bildungsroman genre, that assumes as its end goal a loquacious and consumptive assimilation. They testify to the violent clamor of settler modernity's extractivist order while also protecting Indigenous socialities, silently transforming the bildungsroman into a story form capable of narrating a relational, and ecological, social not dependent on any one individual nor on the settler state. Like a feather frustrating a para-military force, the novel's silences sound a survivance ecology that is steadfast, before and beyond the exhausted horizon of the US settler state.

### **The Politics of the Bildungsroman**

Leveraging the conversational and protagonist-driven expectations of the genre most associated with the stabilizing enunciation of the nation, the novel's silences contest a coherent US national culture. Silences in the novel suggest significant differences between those who are silenced and those who choose silence as a form of communal resistance. When read for an individual hero, the novel seems only to confirm the tragic nature of the Osage's experience in Western modernity.<sup>226</sup> Even near *Sundown*'s close, Chal remains an apparently fallen protagonist, longing for a place in the social world, for enunciation in bildungsromantic terms:

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<sup>226</sup> In a quarter of a century the Osage went from one of the most formidable strongholds against European and American expansion to a people more and more dependent upon the US government for articulations of personhood and land rights. Though the Osage made many attempts at legislating their identity within the US governmental system, those efforts were continually thwarted. For more on Osage history, see Warrior's *The People and the Word*, as well as Wilson, Hunter, and Musiol.

He wanted to challenge something; to strut before an enemy. He wanted by some action or some expression, to express the whole meaning of life; to declare to the silent world about him that he was a glorious male; to express to the silent forms of the blackjacks that he was a brother to the wind, the lightening and the forces that came out of the earth. He fell.  
(297)

Throughout the novel, Chal consistently craves “some action or some expression,” his silences marking him a failure by most bildungsroman standards.<sup>227</sup> The supposedly essential role that speech plays in the novel of formation is perhaps why many scholars of *Sundown* have cited Chal’s failure to say anything as evidence of his frustrated and conflicted growth.<sup>228</sup> Certainly, *Sundown* confronts the difficulty of articulating Osage identity in the context of the Osage’s abrupt confrontation with Western modernity. However, if expression *with* hegemonic national discourse is a central concern of the bildungsroman, the novel’s divergent silences suggest a more capacious, and less individual, social politic than typically assumed in the genre.

*Sundown* follows the comic arc of a bildungsroman narrative, tracing the subject formation of an individual through social assimilation and accommodation. However, the novel silently departs from the genre’s conversational status quo. The comic nature of the individual’s integration into the social, in the bildungsroman, is customarily registered through language; silence is simply a register of “how terrible, how essentially violent,

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<sup>227</sup> In his work on the bildungsroman, Franco Moretti asserts that an individual’s incorporation into the social body occurs through discourse. Silence, in Moretti’s terms, is only an indication of a lack of power. His comments on silence and the ritual of initiation in the bildungsroman take on new significance in light of recent #metoo coverage of Moretti. I was loath to include him. Yet Moretti’s position is relevant not just to the critique that *Sundown* launches--aimed at Eurocentricism and its power dynamics, of which Moretti seems emblematic. It is equally vital to acknowledge, contra Moretti’s claims on and off the genre, that conversation is not just a sign of coercion, but also a means of establishing consent. What’s more, we only have to think of the immense capacity of whisper networks and knowing glances to bolster “the silence breakers” to recognize that “silences” communicate, especially when there are not yet words. It is my hope that this footnote articulates a mode of social and scholarly accountability that is vocabulary building, and in keeping with Nicole Seymour’s careful consideration of citation politics in the #MeToo era.

<sup>228</sup> See Larson, Parker, Wiget, and Hunter.

the ritual of initiation can be” (Moretti 132). In Franco Moretti’s theory of the bildungsroman, to be silent “means that, in the climactic moment of his existence, the individual agrees to deprive himself of the most elementary right: the right to talk, the right to reason, to ‘have his say’” (132). Moretti regards the self-deprivation of the male-pronoun-ed individual as insignificant in the larger social drama. The individual seems to play “a role that has existed for him unchanging, and before which his arguments must remain mute” (132). Silence is, in Moretti’s view, nothing more than a paucity of the individual’s rights in the face of a static social script.

This critical obsession with conversation as a sign of social integration clarifies a progressive ideology associated with the form and its natural/national origins.

Specifically, this particular social only maintains its comic structure of integration within a Euro-American context. In the script of US national narratives, Arnold Krupat argues:

Native American decline is the necessary condition for the comic ascent of Euramerican civilization, and it is by means of this particular structure--the apparent tragedy as actual comedy--that the silent, absent editor speaks his acceptance of progressivist ideology, confirming the inevitability of Indian defeat in the manner of western autobiography. (49)

Krupat inverts the comic privilege that Moretti details. For Krupat, silence marks the comic integration into US national belonging that demands a relinquishing of attachments to Indigenous cultures, traditions, or beliefs. In the Euro-American bildungsroman that Moretti explores and Krupat explodes, Native tragedy signals a manifest destiny comedy where the Native person is always tragicomically contained in a “Kill the Indian” (tragic) to “Save the Man” (comic) form. Both Moretti’s comically socialized Euro-American individual and Krupat’s tragic Native take as their respective preconditions the binary of conversation-silence. In both, silence signals a tragic lack--either of the individual in their

social assimilation, or the Native disappearance upon which such social assimilation is predicated. Contrarily, *Sundown*'s silences offer a comedy outside "development" narratives--even theorizations contesting their comic or tragic nature. The novel disrupts any and all social organization undergirding the bildungsroman, rejecting any homogeneity associated with the extraction economies fueling tacitly white, Euro-American nationalism.

In fact, though ostensibly modeling a universal vision for what successful social integration might look like, the Euro-American bildungsroman assumes assimilation that is raced white in concert with US nationalist myth. From its inception, the bildungsroman concerned a specific social formation, namely (and historically) white European society. This mythic national sociality owes its imagination to its European predecessors and their romantic notions of nature and nation, a nation that Aileen Moreton-Robinson confirms is always figured as a white possession. Similarly, scholars attentive to issues of race and empire have argued that non-European and subaltern writers turn to the bildungsroman form to achieve a dual function: the formation of protagonists and the transformation of dominant hegemonic culture.<sup>229</sup> In what is often deemed the ethnic American bildungsroman, the form itself becomes a political project foregrounded in the possibility of breaking apart sociocultural ideologies cemented into the genre's white nationalist comedy. *Sundown* not only anticipates by a half-century novels cited as performing such resistant politics, it also rejects the hegemonic premises by which "development," the individual, and the social are measured.

In the place of a white national social, *Sundown* sets a sociality responsible to Indigenous presence, alert to settler capital and extraction economies, and attuned to the

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<sup>229</sup> See Esty, Lima, and Bolaki.

coadaptation and survival of the more than human environs. While not foreclosing the possibility of continuity between the individual and community, silences in *Sundown* stress the essential nature of community for determining meaning. There are communicative “eloquent” silences and Chal’s frustrated articulations, the silence of adaptational resistance to assimilationist projects and the prescriptive expectations of the bildungsroman that silence Chal.

In the context of thwarted Osage attempts to assert identity within legal frameworks defining American citizenship, silence offers a rich intervention in (what seem to be) over-determined readings of either Chal’s “failure” or criticism’s myopic focalizations on bildungsromanic protagonists to the exclusion of the broader social. In *Tribal Secrets*, Robert Warrior argues that both Vine Deloria Jr. and Mathews understood that “the silence of the traditional people was not due to their having nothing to say” (85). According to Warrior, both Deloria and Mathews use silence to index a “deep suspicion and resentment toward the contradictory white values they have decided to endure” (48). Mathews’s novel showcases the intricacies of Warrior’s insight. *Sundown*’s silences place the protagonist within a broader, and longer vision of what constitutes the social. The novel illuminates silence’s potential for questioning historical, cultural, critical, and generic over-determinations of what constitutes “having one’s say.” The diversity of silences suggest comic and communal resilience as an alternative to the white settler capital cohering to the idea of the “nation” that is assumed in the genre. The novel outwaits--and thus rejects--the national-historical time of the bildungsroman and its assimilationist function.

### ***Sundown's Individual Silences***

The most overt intervention *Sundown* makes is in the bildungsroman genre itself, subverting the ostensible requirements for its protagonist's comedic position with the social world. Instead of tracing the individual protagonist's comic integration into society, from his birth Chal is marked by an ambiguous and complex, rather than direct, relationship to community, and to the binary of comedy and tragedy. At his birth, he is named Challenge in prophecy that he will be "a challenge to the disinheritors of his people" (*Sundown* 4). This prophecy prefigures him into a tragic mode, demanding an individual hero who faces a challenge. This tragic position is complicated by the fact that he is named in opposition to *disinheritors*, an identity inherently dependent upon the identification of an Other, and the Other's identification with, and subsequent disavowal of, his people and their inheritance. Further ambiguity lurks in what constitutes his people and their inheritance, whether it be ancestral or property relations, or both. Out of this dynamic ambiguity, his prophetic nomenclature fixes him into a comedic affirmation formed through two tragic negations: he is a *rejection* of those who *refuse* a relationship of inheritance with his people.

Challenge's name both presages and perplexes the unfulfilled plotline prophesied at his birth. First, Chal's defiant name is made silent, truncated, as Challenge is cut down to Chal.<sup>230</sup> The lost ending of his name signifies a thwarted destiny within the tragic trajectory predicted by his full name. Indeed, throughout the novel, where Chal is concerned, silence typifies a type of alienation, a cut-off-ness. Chal's uneasy silences in the novel mark his social estrangement: from the tranquil life he thinks he is meant to live and his distance from the prattle of a social world within which he cannot consistently

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<sup>230</sup> Gratitude to Kaitlin Stodola for pointing to the significance of Chal's shortened name.

perform.<sup>231</sup> From the outset the novel establishes Chal as a double negative--a Chal(-  
lenge) without a stable people and without an identifiable destiny. He is prefigured  
neither to comically integrate nor to tragically challenge. Instead, his silences contest  
expectations that preemptively cut off what, who, and with whom Challenge can become:  
both the bildungsroman's comedic expectation of integration as well as any tragic  
demand for an individual hero implied in his name.

Indeed, what constitutes his people and his becoming remains a contested space  
throughout the novel. Though at times Chal does identify with the Osage, more often he  
is fighting against the limitations of that identification. In fact the first community Chal  
identifies with is the American military, as he imagines himself a "bemedalled general"  
early in the story (10). Chal's assimilation is foregrounded by his inability to ever locate a  
stable people, frustrating the homogenizing function of national narratives as Homi  
Bhabha describes in his seminal work, *Nation and Narration*.<sup>232</sup> Thus, the novel denies  
the comic assimilation assumed in a protagonist-centered bildungsroman, but also rejects  
the tragic narrative of heroic conflict, instead declaring Chal a tragicomic hero destined  
for disappointment without a stable or homogeneous people to defend.

Though Chal's silences are not due to his having nothing to say, they do indicate  
insufficiency--the absence of the "correct" words to perform within the pack-spirit

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<sup>231</sup> In the first chapter, the free indirect discourse of the narrator proclaims a life with Chal's childhood friends, seemed to "be a part of the life he was destined to live," a life defined by "the silence, the tranquility of his home" (12, 13). However, Chal's journey from the stillness of home begins shortly after this declaration, as he moves to the university. As Chal moves farther away, he "remembered the silence, and though he grew more loquacious as he learned to say meaningless things, he had a reverence for it as long as he lived" (13).

<sup>232</sup> Chal tries various access points for assimilating into "modern" culture, such as the reservation school, the football team, the university fraternity, the military, the automobile, and the decadent lifestyle associated with alcohol. Every possible identity he tries, he quickly finds to not fit. Chal dismisses each, declaring boredom.



bildungsroman social. Silences also mark Chal's refusal to act within a stable signification of belonging that national discourse demands and enforces, even when that belonging is Osage. The first of Chal's silences occurs when Chal is bullied at school and longs for the "mysteriously forceful" words that "could vindicate him" (29). Three days later Chal finds himself again confronted by the bullies' bravado. He stands quiet, believing silence to be "the greatest insult" (54). This initial silence, an insulting act of defiance, occurs with a group of Osage boys who seem to have already been interpellated by, and thus presage, a type of white dominant sociality that mimics the coercive, bully-logic of US national belonging. Though "The pack spirit was finally set aflame by his silence and lack of action," Chal does not realize the extent to which his silences, his refusals, frustrate the assimilationist agenda implicit to the genre (54). This bully-logic is again expressed at the university, where "Chal found it difficult to enter into the conversations at the fraternity house" and, instead, "naturally he became silent" (139). Chal often recognizes what he "should" say within the expectations of the hegemonic social, yet his silence emphasizes his frustrated place outside of that discourse.<sup>233</sup> Still, "He tried to force himself to [talk] several times" but never felt such feigned interest to be justified (143). Indeed Chal's silences index his misgivings about, in Robert Warrior's words, "the contradictory white values" of university life, and the loquacious demands of its social incorporation (48). Chal's silences signal the contradiction between the desire for communication and the violence implicit to the "pack spirit."

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<sup>233</sup> For instance, Chal cannot express his attraction to or sympathy for a girl he had been ice-skating with who falls: "He had skated up to her and remained silent. He had felt helpless and had begun cursing himself because he had nothing to say about her fall; no words of regret or inquiry about her disaster. He had pulled her up and had felt that he ought to express to her that he was very sorry, but he hadn't been able to say anything" (141).

These silences indicate more than Chal's ineptitude in the face of coercive sociality. Once we move beyond the protagonist, silences begin to signify the possibility for frustrating coercive social mores. When at a sorority dinner Chal does not "talk as other people talked" and his date Blo reads his silence as "a kind of challenge to her effectiveness" (149). Just as the abridged version of his name prophesizes, Chal fails to fully comprehend what he is challenging, though Blo understands. Blo recognizes the potential in Chal's silences to spoil the sorority's successful social organization--to frustrate either "the individual losing himself in the unit, or else just the influence of the herd instinct" (149). Here, *Sundown* shows silence can resist the military-like "unit" of homogenous social organization, seen in the "pack spirit" of the fraternity or the "herd instinct" of its female counterpart.

Chal's refusal or failure to proffer the "correct" words often confound the social references that elude him--both signifying and inciting a crisis of meaning associated with national narrative. Silences thus function as "a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where," according to Homi Bhabha, "the claim to be representative provokes a crisis" (297). For Chal, these confounding moments almost choke him, signaling "something which had to be expressed but which he couldn't possibly put into words or actions" (Mathews, *Sundown* 257). Time and again Chal's silence fails to relieve the constriction he feels. Yet, when understood beyond the isolated and fallen protagonist, silences indicate the implied instability of social belonging within the bildungsroman's social. Silence indicates a disruption to the comedic, white nationalist Euro-American social structure that depends on a tragic disappearance of the Other.

The very fact that silences indicate non-incorporation challenges the comedy-tragedy assumptions of the genre. In this, *Sundown* contests a world where all must be (or can and should be) comically integrated into a nationalist, universalist sociality whose whiteness is made invisible through its assimilationist assumptions. Indeed, other silences in the novel animate a comedy outside the tragicomedy of generic assimilation. These exemplify what scholars have termed eloquent, semiotic silence.

### ***Sundown*'s Eloquent Silences**

In contrast to the idle chatter Chal associates with the performative veneer of a social that quiets him, silence can communicate resistance and resilience. In several decades worth of critical study, silence has been shown to hold the capacity to register a lack, as with Chal, or a form of eloquent articulation that carries significant semiotic force. Keith Basso, in his seminal study of silence and the Western Apache, notes that although popular literature characterizes Native American silence as “impoverished language,” silence is immanently dependent upon contextual variables to determine its valence as a communicative act (15). In many Indigenous traditions, silence has been noted to function performatively or semiotically (Agyekum 31).

Similarly, for scholars working in linguistic analysis, eloquent silence constitutes a linguistic act that poses a direct challenge to “silencing,” an act of deprivation where a person (or a group of persons) is intentionally--and at times forcibly--excluded from expression.<sup>234</sup> When focalized through the position of Chal, silence indexes the failure of a tragic hero within the traditional bildungsroman form. However, how his silences are

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<sup>234</sup> Scholars often use what the Greeks described as *evyloti slopi*, or “eloquent silence,” to understand silence that carries meaning and illocutionary force based upon particular positions, length, and contexts (Sifianou 65). See especially Ephratt and Sifiano, as well as the *Journal of Pragmatics* special issue dedicated to the topic, edited by Dennis Kurzon.

received, in conversation with the many other silences in the novel, enunciate unresolved tension with the tragic quiet associated with the Euro-American bildungsroman. In *Sundown* eloquent silence emphasizes the dissonance between Euro-American assimilation and the ways of being such assimilation aims to mute. *Sundown*'s silences, in Cheryl Walker's terms, preserve "the oxymoron: that is, the contradiction implied by two incompatible discourses within which it becomes clear there are gaps and fissures one cannot dismiss. That aporia, that silence, must give one pause" (xv). From the very beginning, *Sundown* sets us in that aporiatic pause, the space that shows saying nothing can convey profound meaning.

The scene that opens the novel, Chal's birth, is sonorous with tranquil silences eloquently juxtaposed to the violent clamor of progress. In the first three pages of *Sundown*, "ominous milk-warm silence" composes the soundscape of Chal's beginning, sounds to which Chal's mother is especially attuned. The "tranquil, silver night of silence" is interrupted when Chal's father, John, perhaps the strongest exemplar of the assimilatory logic of progress, slams a door: "it was like a gunshot on the stillness" (*Sundown* 2). The silences of the Osage land represent a haven from figures like John, whose orational pomposities flourish with "meaningless things" and shatter "the silence, the tranquility of his home" (13). The silence of the novel's opening contests a myopic focus on Chal's tragic trajectory within the bildungsroman comedy. The eloquence of these silences articulate a form of agency that resists the commotion of consumptive "progress" in favor of a rooted and more-than-human, community.

Power-full quiet is perhaps nowhere better seen than in the oft-silent figure of Chal's mother. She remains unnamed throughout the novel and her silence in name and

presence signals great capacity to perceive and protect. She quietly acknowledges the auspicious sounds of Chal's birth and silently corrects John's indiscriminate faith in the noise of progress. Like the maternally evocative "milk warm silence" attending his birth, Chal's mother's silence is always characterized in resistance to her husband John's naïve belief in white culture's civilizing advancement. Her "calm silence and deftness" marks a powerful suspicion of the white men "who talked from the end of their tongues" and whose laws would serve to dissolve Osage governance and dispossess Osage from their lands (15, 57). The mother's silences provoke John, who "didn't like the Indian silence of his wife" but receives her silence as rebuke and soon after erupts with admission of the government's guilt: "I jist guess they did have somethin' to do with it" (53, 58). Chal's mother's silences silence John's loquaciousness, illustrating Warrior's claim that, "the silence of traditional people" often corrects the errors of those "speaking most loudly" (85). Chal's mother signifies an agential and relational form of communication outside the cacophonous social order often assumed in the bildungsroman.

Whereas the mother's silences arraign colonial narratives of "development," silences also resist the politics of recognition so central to the brutal assimilation rituals symbolic of white "civilizing" practices. Running Elk and Suns-On-His-Wings, Chal's friends from boyhood who join him at college, use silence as a gesture of noncompliance when both remain silent and avoid being "struck" in the fraternity ceremony (108). After Chal allows himself to be hit, Running Elk is called but "stood still. There was nothing on his face, and he said nothing" (107).<sup>235</sup> The fraternity elder is incensed, then baffled, then

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<sup>235</sup> Warrior observes, "Their expressionless faces hide their deep suspicion and resentment toward the contradictory white values they have decided to endure" and places the "breaking point" in this scene, when they "refuse to submit and the next day pack their bag in disgust and leave the university" (*Tribal Secrets* 48).

turned away by Running Elk's refusal. While Running Elk performs the trope of the silent, stoic Indian, he does so to frustrate recognition by the same colonial system responsible for such a trope. In this moment, silence offers a potent rejection of what Glen Coulthard calls the colonial politics of recognition (3). Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* argues that promises of recognition and reconciliation are disingenuous and at the center of colonial relationships with Indigenous peoples and the nation-state. Both men's silences frustrate the "pack-spirit" mentality epitomizing a broader colonial politics of recognition at work in the Euro-American bildungsroman's social belonging. In this, they suggest a decolonial space articulated in, and protected by, silence.

Not only do eloquent silences work to baffle the colonial politics of recognition, when they "ring" or "roar" they sound the decolonial spaces in *Sundown*. Chapter VI sees the arrival of the spectacle of civilization and American citizenship as the industrial derricks march into town. At that moment, "the ringing silence of the morning" precedes "the long, quavering chant of death from the hills across the valley" (64). This chapter juxtaposes the ringing silence of the natural world and the frenzied death chant, a metaphor for white-conceptualized progress. Yet, just as progress--the "quavering *chant* of death"--begins to slowly creep from the hills across the valley, ringing silence signals an eloquent warning rooted to place, as in the hills, the prairie, or the blackjacks (64, *emphasis added*). Shortly after the death chant is heard, Chal, Running-Elk, and Sun-On-His-Wings arrive from weathering a storm by clinging to the flexible strength of the blackjack trees. Upon return, their unspoken observation of the frenetic energy of modernity makes up the "roar that shook the earth under their feet," their silence apposed to civilization's chatter--talk so predominant that the free indirect discourse notes, "White

people seemed so helpless when they couldn't talk" (82, 83). These silences exhibit what Coulthard calls a "grounded normativity." Grounded normativity challenges colonial sovereignty and capitalist social relations and refers to the "modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that informs and structures our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and non-human others over time" (13). Much of the silences in the novel communicate a "grounded normativity" rooted in biosocial networks far deeper than the shallow surface limits of capitalist colonial economies.

The roars of silence in the novel signal durability, roots able to outlast the age and modes of recognition associated with settler colonialism. This endurance synchronizes with what N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* terms the "long outwaiting," a resistant continuance that, for Momaday, characterizes Native peoples' relationships with settler-colonialism (52). The novel's silences sound a social identity outside the assimilation or vanishing limits entrenched in colonial recognition, or upheld by colonial progress and capitalist development, or narratively spoken in the bildungsroman. These eloquent silences sound with sovereignties beyond human-to-human relations and outside the fever of progress that will surely burn out.<sup>236</sup>

### ***Sundown's Sacred Silences***

Articulating a time beyond the mechanical noise of settler capitalism, *Sundown's* silences also trouble a notion of justice hallmarked by the aphorism "silence is compliance." Instead, through a din of silences, the novel defines justice as a sacred,

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<sup>236</sup> *Sundown's* eloquent silences are echoed in Dylan Miner's 2015 installation "Silence of Sovereignty," which engages the "quotidian and silent ways that Indigenous sovereignties are performed and enacted, not in ways that are linked to Western political structures, but ones that intimately connect individuals with each other and with the land."

communal responsibility. As one of the few religious structures that remain in Osage territory, the Peyote ceremonies exemplify a form of justice enacted through sacred silence. The syncretic belief system of the Peyote religion exemplifies an adaptable model of Osage continuity, as a “mixture of the old religion, Christianity” and a “new belief in passivity and retribution” (266). The narration notes that it violates the “religious beliefs as a Peyote worshipper to seek revenge,” or individually focused reprisal (184). Instead, the religious system promotes retribution through responsibility for the psychological and spiritual healing of those who have been wronged. The ceremonies are filled by silences that emphasize this accountability. “[L]ong silences” punctuate the characters’ reflections on “those People who have been killed by these white men” but refuse to articulate details (273). These silences thus exemplify what David Moore has termed “sacred silence” in Native American literature. Moore argues that silence can protect sacred space because “chosen, evocative silence, dynamic silence may itself take on sacred qualities in subtle ways that affirm cultural boundaries and cultural survival” (36). In these ceremonies, silence marks a form of retribution that does not seek harm for the sake of harm, but implicitly offers correction to ensure the health of the community. These sacred silences reformulate the oft-repeated aphorism to consider the ways “silence can be indictment,” recognizing the frequent failure of words to obtain justice.

These accusations are further articulated in the novel’s textual silences. The novel holds the deaths of community members in dynamic, resistant textual silences. These silences refuse to exploit the deaths in the novel through the recognizable spectacle of tragedy. Instead, they articulate a form of retribution that unflinchingly confronts the clangor of settler civilization’s systemic violences. One of the first significant deaths in



the story is that of John, Chal's father. The text unceremoniously mentions the death in one abrupt line: "One morning, [Chal] received a telegram that his father had been killed. He got leave and went home." The very next sentence, "He was sitting in the front room with his mother," is a scene punctuated by silence. After sitting "silently for several minutes," his mother reveals that "'They found his pistol in his hand' . . . Then another long silence." She continues, "'Your father said that the gov'mint would not let these white people cheat Indians, but they have done it all the time.'" There was another silence" (235). Breaking the culmination of silences, his mother speculates, "'I believe his tongue said this so that his heart could hear it'" (236). John's "tongue" was the primary agent by which he fooled himself into trusting the government and the white people who figure as representative. In contrast, the details of John's passing are only referred to through the evasive "it," a textual silence that echoes the indictment in the mother's pauses.

The guilty, the murderers, become intelligible in these silences, and there are many. During a Peyote ceremony, Chal and other community members begin to discuss Running Elk's death. Prior to this, his death is veiled in silence. The reader is informed in a rhetorical *post facto* reference, "But he was dead now," that leaves the details of Running Elk's end and the intimacy of Chal's grief unarticulated, unrepresented, and inaccessible (258). The novel protects the sacredness of grief from public consumption while these textual silences insinuate the violence of the US national assimilationist project and its extractive industries. During the Peyote ceremony it becomes clear that the community "knew who was killing those Big Hills one by one" (270). Yet the novel

again refuses to name the criminal(s) or articulate the legal outcome of the murders.<sup>237</sup>

These narrative silences are emblematic of a “resistant mourning,” what Patricia Rae, in her introduction to *Modernism and Mourning*, calls mourning that disrupts the status quo plot of tragic loss and vengeance to show the insufficiency of any nationalist consolation practice (16). Whereas Moretti argues that, “mourning does not contribute to the *bildung*,” the silences surrounding these deaths suggest a resistant mourning that refuses to be incorporated into a US national narrative of tragic recognition.

The novel itself does not make explicit reference to the scores of deaths associated with the Reign of Terror, but its textual silences suggest a resistant mourning consistent with Osage survival--historical and ongoing. Readers in the 1930’s would at least know the basics of the FBI’s first national case, where settlers exploited the wardship system to facilitate a massive land and resource grab through a string of murders. The textual silences surrounding the novel’s deaths function as ellipses that communicate the “failure of normative compensatory practices in the wake of wartime trauma” (Rae 37). They also signal a resistant mourning capable of condemning an extractive system beyond the historical moment in which the novel was published. Resistant mourning, sanctified through silences, refuses any dismissal of John or Running-Elk as examples of a “vanishing” race, or any attempt for national narrative to relegate their deaths to a necessary, if unfortunate, past in the history of progress. Instead, John and Running-Elk’s deaths live on in a heavy, communicative silence that indicts the system at its roots.

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<sup>237</sup> The only “resolution” occurs after the town has begun to wither from the oil bust and Great Depression, and after two of its most successful citizens have committed suicide. Only then, “there was a great interest in the fact that a group of citizens in Bill country had been accumulating several headrights” (305).

*Sundown* silently extends its critique beyond the immediate context of the Reign of Terror to indict the consumptive structure of settler capitalist violence. In these silences, the novel refuses any voyeuristic curiosity or sensationalist representation of the horrors, but simultaneously honors what must necessarily be forgotten in US national narrative: every single one of these deaths.<sup>238</sup> The novel protects the sacredness of a community mourning murdered citizens while also refusing any amnesia regarding the brutality, specific and systemic, of US settler capitalism. *Sundown* outwaits this settler sadism. The novel shows the greed perpetrated and perpetuated by settler capitalism's death chant consumes more than land or citizens. It ultimately consumes itself. In this, the novel's silences insist that there can be no separation of Indigenous and environmental politics.

### ***Sundown's Ecological Silences***

The sacred and eloquent silences in the novel narrate an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist environmentalism. The silences cohere in an indictment of the short-term frenzy and long-term exhaustion of a system that consumes everything in its path. This coherence may clarify critical disagreements exemplified in David Moore's claim that "survival itself proves to be the sacred process" in the novel, whose optimism is in stark contrast to critics who read the death chant of progress so successful as to consume the entire plot of *Sundown* (Moore 641).<sup>239</sup> Silences in the novel suggest neither of these

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<sup>238</sup> This is not to say that the novel equates all victims of "development." In fact, Enrique Lima's work with the economic theories of "uneven development" clarifies how writers from colonial spaces take up the bildungsroman to expose capitalist modernity as a process of uneven development and thus not totalizing nor universal. Esty's *Unseasonable Youth* explores the relationship between "uneven development" of colonial spaces and the interventions of a modernist bildungsroman. Though not discussed by either scholar, *Sundown* is a paradigmatic case study for illuminating the relationship between form and settler colonial capitalist politics.

<sup>239</sup> Hannah Musiol, for example, reads *Sundown* as a narrative of tragic sunset.

positions deviate from an anthropomorphic survival-at-all-costs notion dangerously close to the coded Darwinism used to justify violence and exploitation (this thinking persists when disease or ecological colonization is said to be the primary agent of colonization, making genocide seem an inevitable, if unfortunate, result of evolution).<sup>240</sup> Instead, *Sundown*'s silences signify a more-than-human community, where survival is predicated on outwaiting any one individual "sunset." This long-term vision endures beyond the individual-to-state reconciliation model often invoked in environmental criticism, where the brutality of colonization is a past phenomenon and Indigenous land rights must be subsumed by the immediacy of environmental concerns. This, Coulthard astutely warns, is often a greener package for the same shortsighted settler-colonial extraction model (125). The sacred and eloquent silences in the novel resist such greenwashing, suggesting that historical and ongoing violence perpetrated in the name of settler colonial capital will be outlasted through a communal, Indigenous-centered, rootedness.

No better image captures the eloquent silence of outwaiting than Mathews's beloved blackjack oak trees, trees known for their survival in unlikely, even hostile, environments. In Mathews's *Talking To The Moon*--a book often (but not unproblematically) referred to as the "Indian *Walden*"--Mathews takes pains to trace the historical and symbolic significance of the blackjacks for the Osage (*Talking* 22).<sup>241</sup> Growing in rocky, sandy, poor, and dry soils where few other woody plants can survive, the trees have particular importance to the Osage for their stubborn survival strategies. The blackjacks symbolize resilience. In Mathews's words, "There they stood throughout the drought, gloriously green; a symbol of life everlasting in an expanse of brown

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<sup>240</sup> See David Stannard's *American Holocaust*.

<sup>241</sup> For more on the blackjacks as a marker of resilience in *Talking to the Moon*, see Schweninger.

desolation” (*Talking* 107).<sup>242</sup> For Mathews, the blackjacks symbolized a long-term resilience epitomized in their dense, durable networks: “When they are thick and their black, lancelike arms are interlaced, they are almost impenetrable by day and dangerous by night” (*Talking* 23).<sup>243</sup> The blackjack's quiet, enduring patience and rootedness point to a temporality outside the generic forms of US settler survival that *Sundown* leverages in the bildungsroman.

The blackjacks are a consistent marker of Osage identity, presence, and resilience throughout the text--their persistent silence stubbornly complicating any rejection of the novel as a tragic conclusion to a narrative about the vanishing Osage. Indeed, Chal's fall, with which this reading began, is recovered by and in the blackjacks: throughout the novel, clinging to the blackjacks provides the security to “not fall to the ground and die” (*Sundown* 41). They “stood there so patiently, as they had always done, and seemed to pay no attention to all the activity of Progress in the valley at their feet” (67). Even as the “black derricks . . . sprang up among the blackjacks” and “a deep silence settled over the valley,” the silent resilience of the blackjacks becomes a model for adaptable survival (78). Eventually, the blackjacks fall back, “stepping with dignity to protect their toes,” but they do not disappear (303). Rather the opposite, for the novel's last chapter notes the “all powerful life that had come with the creeping black derricks began to recede” as the blackjacks remain (303). These trees index the histories, memories, and experiences of violence that define settler colonial relations with Indigenous communities like the Osage. As a continuous reminder of the relationships of the People to the place, the silent

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<sup>242</sup> For more on *Talking to the Moon*'s relevance to readings of *Sundown*, see Christopher Schedler's extended analysis in *Border Mordernisms*.

<sup>243</sup> Mathews even named the sandstone house he built when he moved back to Osage territory “Blackjacks,” in tribute to their “unconquerable” nature (*Talking* 152).

blackjacks disrupt glib tales of Indigenous vanishing upon which ideologies of progress and civilization, and indeed settler colonialism itself, are predicated.<sup>244</sup>

Throughout the novel the blackjacks enact a consistent and flexible strength able to resiliently endure the conflict-ridden advancement of progress. The uncommodifiable quality of the blackjacks makes them not only a symbol of the continuance of Osage identity but also a model of resistance to extractionist economies extending beyond cultural boundaries. Blackjacks make very poor lumber and thus are the oldest hardwood stands in the continental United States.<sup>245</sup> As one of the only woods in the area not easily converted into commodity, the blackjacks figure as the persistent foil to the “black derricks,” a foil that importantly endures beyond the derricks’ march. Chapter VI marks the derricks’ arrival; chapter XVI witnesses the oil scaffolds in their last push; the final chapter sees the derricks recede. The blackjacks remain. In place of a comic story of Euro-American integration, which is predicated on the tragic loss of Indigenous life, culture, and nonhuman relations, *Sundown*’s comedy is a survival through deep, flexible, and resilient rootedness.

### ***Sundown*’s Survivance Ecology**

*Sundown* concludes with sonorous ecological survival. The eloquent, sacred, and accusatory silences throughout the novel resound with comedic ecological community at the novel’s close. Near the end, the blackjacks’ “profound silence” and patience begins to accuse the drunkenly dizzy Chal of something (298). Soon after, a flock of birds silently scold him from the safety of the boughs of the blackjack grove (301). These accusations

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<sup>244</sup> See Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places*, which explores the inextricable nature of story telling and landscape to cultural identity, and how “place making becomes a form of narrative art” (33).

<sup>245</sup> Thanks to my colleague Taylor McHolm for this timber lesson.

give way to the sounds of more-than-human community, drowning out the individual protagonist as the novel sets.

The ecological comedy of the novel is forcefully enunciated in the last scene, as a sparrow knocks a young robin out of its nest and to its death. The mother robin quickly appears “to feed the remaining nestlings. She failed to realize that anything had happened to the fourth” (309). The scene parallels the very next page where his mother imagines Chal as a “little warrior” who “killed many sparrows” (310). The proximity of these scenes connects the sparrow, which “cocked his head” and kills the nestling, to Chal “holding up a cock sparrow for her approval” (309, 311). Chal kills the sparrow, who kills the robin, who fails to notice.<sup>246</sup> The loss of the young robin, a bird whose fluctuating population Mathews notes makes it difficult to determine the particular species as Indigenous or northern, is caused by a species invasive to North America (*Talking* 38). Likewise, the scene flies over borders of national allegory in service of strengthening a social through long-term, multi-species survival.

In *Sundown* the tragic loss of the baby robin exists *within* a comic survival of the entire species. The robin, like the silences in the novel, highlights a profound suspicion of the power of individual subjects. The novel’s comic ending refuses the “ecological Indian” trope, rejects the containment of Osage identity in a single representative figure, and challenges theorization of individual survival outside that individuals social and ecological networks. *Sundown* sets up an ecological comedy as an alternative to the chatter of self-centered progress so problematized by the novel, its time period, and, indeed, our own environmentally crisis-ed moment.

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<sup>246</sup> The use of the personal pronoun is meant to indicate non-human personhood.

The novel's comic mode is not an anthropocentric comedy of survival or the raced-tragedy of the Euro-American bildungsroman but rather the biocentric survival of an ecological social--an ecological survivance. Through *Sundown* survivance ecology offers a comedic mode of survival, resistance, and non-hierarchical, more-than-human sociality. *Sundown*'s survivance ecology theorizes a dynamic sociality that reveals how literature can support the survival of the nonhuman alongside the survivance of Indigenous peoples. It also reconciles some of the most formative social and ecological theory of the past fifty years. Survivance ecology exemplifies Anishinaabe Gerald Vizenor's notion of survivance. Survivance combines survival and resistance to represent an ironic mode that actively resists absence and possession through a variety of strategies, most notably including silence and humor.<sup>247</sup> As a paradigmatic example of Vizenor's concept, the novel demonstrates how this narrative mode can ally with environmental justice struggles, rehabilitating important theories in radical social and literary ecology, such as post-Marxist Murray Bookchin's "social ecology." Bookchin offers "social ecology" as an alternative non-hierarchical social, but the concept is limited by its lack of engagement with colonialism and racial capitalism.<sup>248</sup> *Sundown*'s survivance ecology exemplifies the ways Vizenor's ideas focalize the bodies that extractionist economies are first built upon.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Popularized in Vizenor's *Manifest Manners*, "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry" (vii).

<sup>248</sup> "Social ecology" marks Bookchin's attempt to move from a "red" to a "green" analysis and critique, though *Sundown* reminds us that such moves must necessarily acknowledge the centrality of Indigenous history to the rise of capitalism, a different conceptual assemblages of "Redness" not privileged in either Red Marxism or Green environmentalism.

<sup>249</sup> In this, *Sundown* is proleptic to contemporary Marxist texts like John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* and Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*.



Survivance ecology also resonates with but improves upon formative theorizations of the ecological value of comedy in literary form. Joseph Meeker's influential notion of "ecological comedy" demands the sacrifice of the anthropocentric protagonist to the wilder ecological world (30). Meeker astutely argues that anthropocentrism is implicit in the tragic formation of a hero whose moral struggles are more important than biological survival. In contrast, the comic mode of fumbling through has superior ecological value (30). Indeed, the comic mode does much to reject the privileged position of a tragic hero. However, Meeker's formulation still relies on settler colonial metaphors of colonization, pioneer conquest, and Puritanism--metaphors that *Sundown* repurposes through a fraternal order of things. In lifting up the "morality-free" nature of comedy, Meeker makes recourse to language that subtly justifies violent means to achieve nonviolent ends.<sup>250</sup> Vizenor's concept of comic survivance is an important corrective to Meeker's fraught metaphors, emphasizing Indigenous resilience and resistance to "literatures of dominance" that over-determine Meeker's concept and persist in the expectations of the bildungsroman (Vizenor 2). *Sundown's* survivance ecology evidences deep suspicion of Moretti's claim that the bildungsroman hero "wants a life free of conflict" without a reference in the "future of the species" (121, 122). Instead, survivance ecology regards futurity as co-constituted across species, space, and time.

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<sup>250</sup> In his *The Comedy of Survival*, hierarchies foreground Meeker's language to assume the beginnings of any successful community lay in unavoidable conquest: pioneer species "risk death in order to conquer new territory," and Meeker rationalizes the pioneer's conquest by its achieved end--"harmonious" natural balance (28). Further, the notion of a climax ecosystem as a harmonious ecological reality has been largely debunked, as William Cronon notes: "There has been no timeless wilderness in a state of perfect changelessness, no climax forest in permanent stasis" (11). By ignoring the political significance of such language, Meeker is bound to the tragic mode even while he seeks to counter it. Even in terms of pioneer species, Robin Wall Kimmerer's work on moss and other species offer examples of repair oriented, rather than destructive, relations. According to Kimmerer, many of what are often referred to as pioneer species build soil, filter toxins, and take advantage of what is given to them and use that to make it better for others.

The survivance ecology of *Sundown*'s bildungsroman promises a future of survival outside the hero-driven form. It rejects the comic/tragic "nature" assumed in US settler nationalism, the binaries "Kill the Indian" (tragedy) to "Save the Man" (comedy), and in a protagonist who merely represents a "pioneer species." Instead, the novel's silences attune to a loss of species, plural. The novel silently stories ecological survivance, insisting on the centrality of Native thought, and of Native thinkers, to decisions regarding with what sort of social, humors, and "species," we want to be in conversation.

*Sundown* proves silence a powerful tool for rupturing the assimilatory assumptions in a genre that privileges an individual protagonist's comic, conversational performance. When we consider the continued difficulty of articulating Osage identity within dominant juridical discourse--where federal law first damned Osage communal traditions through allotment and then failed to protect them as they were murdered for their headrights--silence seems a powerful tool to subvert "language [that] did the capturing, binding Indian society to a future of certain extinction" (Ziff 172). The novel outwaits such attempts to capture and bind by investing the ambiguity of silence with eloquent, sacred, and resilient ecological survivance, proving "there is a vast reserve of silence that can never be colonized, that can never be forced to speak, that can never be taught to speak" (Gould 43).<sup>251</sup> In this, silences do not signify a lack but, rather, articulates a radical invitation to community.

Though some have read *Sundown* as tracing a western conception of a "sunset," the novel's title may be more fittingly read as a celebration of the renewal and

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<sup>251</sup> While Moretti says that the bildungsroman "is born declaring that it can and wants to talk about everything, [though it] prefers as a rule to pass over in silence revolutionary fractures," *Sundown* radically revises Moretti's statement: "to *open up* revolutionary fractures *through* silence" (136).

procreative force of the sunset-sunrise cycle.<sup>252</sup> At *Sundown*'s close, the robin basks in the hot sun, and, "as she bathed in the pan under the hydrant, [she] was the only sound of activity" (312). As she splashes under the spigot, the robin exemplifies an ecological adaptation to technological modernity, but a complex modernity that refuses to articulate with a romantic past or a tragic present Indian-ness. For *Sundown* the central question is not whether the loquacious or frustrated individual will emerge heroically to stand "as a challenge to the disinheritors of his people." Rather, the novel suggests attention be refocused away from a single protagonist's rise or fall and toward the cacophony of multispecies networks and the capacity of the wider human and non-human community to resiliently and heterogeneously endure. *Sundown*'s silences--the individual, the eloquent, the sacred, the ecological--together remind us that survivance in the "long outwaiting" is a performative process, an active being-in-language that simultaneously constitutes and calls for trans-species community. As *Sundown* sets, the tensions between being silenced and choosing, or using, silence speak to a comedic ecology of survivance that proves the bildungsroman form capacious enough to accommodate a more politically and socially responsive comedic form: a tribally specific survivance that persists despite the individual "fall."

For Native communities emerging from decades of coercive assimilationist policies intent on destroying Indigenous governance, fracturing kinship networks, and erasing cultural lifeways--in the service of producing atomized, acquisitive, and extractive private-property-owning individuals--the politics of such formal reorientations are profound. *Sundown*'s silences re-sound Lauren Berlant's assertion that "Much of what we call silence isn't silence at all but political speech and communication that are

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<sup>252</sup> Mathews marks the generative force of sunset in *Talking to the Moon*, 35.

not listened to.” The novel’s silences show not the absence of sound, but the limit of hearing. They invite the reader to read what is *not* said, to recover histories and experiences dis-remembered in settler national narratives, and to imagine social worlds outside the self-destructive and inherently violent paradigm of settler colonial capitalism. Silence in the novel registers a skeptical and ironic tension between the assumed tragedy of a protagonist’s silence, and the nuanced communication of a community using silences as a mode of survivance ecology. The novel’s rendering of an extradiscursive response to settler colonial capitalism radicalizes the genre, enacting a survivance beyond the temporalities of ecological destruction determined by the capitalist US settler nation state. In its silences, *Sundown* suggests survivance ecology is radically relevant to contemporary environmental and social justice struggles. Indeed, just as Polchies lifted the feather on that road in New Brunswick, and again in Idle No More icons, we hear protest roar with the continuity of those witnessing and hastening settler colonial capitalism’s inevitable exhaustion.

### **Genrecide: Genre as time travel**

*Sundown*’s silences express continuity with pipeline protests today and showcase the capaciousness of the *Bildungsroman* for articulating community outside the coercive conversations typically associated with that literary genre. The novel leverages the expectations of a literary genre closely associated with the consolidation of national history to imagine beyond the settler capitalist ideologies undergirding its generic assumptions. *Sundown* shows writing can be a protest against the silencing mechanisms of settler colonial capitalism, a way to simultaneously refuse the indoctrination of national narrative and create “new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification,

through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference itself” (ibid. 313). Indeed, the novel’s silences offer a survivance ecology that conceptualizes community capable of surviving through and beyond the extractive modes of US settler capitalism. Where *Sundown* deploys silences in a genre preoccupied with conversation, many other writers turn to other genres associated with the assimilation, erasure, and extinction narratives of settler capitalism’s cultural (and ecological) genocide. *Sundown* proves a test case of genrecide: how literature can contest modes of incorporation - social, environmental, and narrative - into a national identity associated with industrial U.S. settler capitalism.

So, too, McNickle, Oskison, Mourning Dove, Eastman, and Matthews all use literary genre to remember an ecology of survivance rooted in land and spanning time and space. Against the genocidal histories, the wars, removals, divisions, allotments, and assimilations metaphorized and naturalized by Turner, these writers use literary genres to rupture, kill, the forgetfulness crucial to white innocence. Instead, they use the stakes of Turner’s thesis to upend the pales of patriarchal white settler sovereignty - turning Turner toward the end of his world. They suggest the settler colonial project of systematically dividing Indigenous peoples from their lands is expressed in literary genre in ways that can be used to contest such divisions. Both Oskison and MckNickle use the historical novel – generational and allegorical–to write alternative histories that re-member the violence inherent in the myths of self-creation and renewal that Turner articulated. Marking the extent to which notions of manifest destiny precede and endure beyond Turner’s physical or economic frontiers, both novels disrupt the pedagogical time of homogenous national myth by refusing to forget the myths’ murderous materiality and

remembering alternative relationships to land. Mourning Dove's western romance denounces the brutality inherent in the western's *indian* and its "virgin" availability. Eastman uses his own conversion story, the spiritual autobiography, to capsize national myths that preach from "a machine made religion" but ignore the practices of a transformational Christianity.

These authors exemplify an Indigenous politics of literary genre that, in Jodi Byrd's words, operates "by radically transforming how genres might be said to operate at the site of narrative and representation, the genre fictions that American Indian authors write continue to produce transcultural interventions that disrupt colonialist narratives" (357). Indeed, using the literary genres most associated with the pales of Turner's thesis, these writers show the genres to be capable of an anti-individualism, anti-confinement, anti-fencing, anti-domestication decolonial politic that outwaits—and travels beyond—settler time and space.

These authors confirm a genrecidal canon of environmental justice literature — one that regards literary genre as a performative tool that can be sharpened for survivance. Just as ink and metal are mere substances whose forms define their weaponry, these authors point to form, and its attendant ideologies, as spaces for political agency, not assimilation, coercion, or mimicry. They can "scrutinize the limits of nationalism" and refuse ideological borders to what are infinite spaces for resistance and survivance (Hundorf, *Mapping the Americas*, 5). They suggest relations of repair that are opportunistic, that take advantage of what is given and use it to make conditions better for others.

We draw on these imaginations anytime we acknowledge the continuous, unbroken, and heterogeneous history of resistance from Wounded Knee to Wounded Knee, from Standing Rock to New Brunswick, from removal to restoration, reparations, land repatriation. Ultimately, these novels contribute to a time-space continuum of survivance, one rooted in responsibility to the predominantly more-than-human world and directed toward worlds of abundance where success is defined in continuity and responsibility. The survivance ecology of genocide is as powerfully told in the enduring and flexible strength of a feather as it is in the resolute endurance of anti-colonial environmental imaginations stretching from before the beginning of what is currently known as the United States to after the end of the settler climate-changing world. It is to these climate imaginations that we now turn.

CHAPTER VI  
GENRECIDE, SURVIVANCE ECOLOGY, AND THE APOCALYPTIC CRISIS IN  
CLIMATE FICTION

“Do we have enough time to do anything that matters? Can we do something that matters for enough people? How do we relinquish victory and loss? Can we evolve beyond a construct of constant enemies, constant crisis? Does emergence mean eventually leaving Earth – or never leaving Earth? How are we resilient during apocalypse?”  
– adrienne maree brown, 272-3

The questions brown poses summarize many of the most important concerns raised in hopes of forestalling catastrophes associated with changing climates. To explore potential answers, scholars and artists have turned to fictional narrations known as climate fiction, or CliFi which narrates the shifting scales of time, geography, and geology around climate change in an attempt to cultivate a sociality equipped for adaptation and prevention.<sup>253</sup> Much debate has centered on which genres are most expedient to this objective and which genres buttress the systems that CliFi seeks to diagnose and transform, a quandary that Stephanie LeMenager calls CliFi’s “genre trouble.” CliFi’s genre trouble is especially pronounced in fiction that imagines climate change through disaster tropes associated with the genre of apocalypse without attending to the political stakes of the questions brown poses.<sup>254</sup> These apocalyptic CliFi narratives,

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<sup>253</sup> The term CliFi was introduced by Daniel Bloom in 2007 but seemed to reach a wide audience in 2012 with Daniel Krumb’s article “Climate Change Fiction Melts Away Just When Its Needed” in *The Guardian*. For a broad overview of the broader discussions around the novel form and climate change, see Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* and Shelby Street’s *Imaging the Future of Climate Change*.

<sup>254</sup> For a few of the most influential treatments of the politics of apocalypse and literary genre for imagining climate change, see Fredrick Buell’s *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement*, and Larry Lohman’s provocative and polarizing “Fetishisms of the Apocalypse.” Indeed, apocalypse persists as one of the most dominant modes of climate fiction—some prominent examples can be found in *Solar*, *The Back of the Turtle*, *The Flood*,



like the broader generic tradition, too, warn of imminent destruction and call for a people's repentance before the promised judgment day. Despite their status as the most recent addition to a long-standing tradition of environmental apocalypse metaphors and story arcs, CliFi's apocalyptic tropes are frequently deficient in imagining the slow violence of a changing climate or venturing beyond the structures of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism at the heart of climate crisis.<sup>255</sup>

CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism describes the structural, environmental, and racial violences of settler colonial capitalism, and is a term well suited to the apocalyptic atmospheres of climate fiction. Apocalypse CliFi often repeats western epistemologies and social structures that cannot imagine solving a problem any other way than cataclysmic redemption of a settled (settler) future.<sup>256</sup> As a paradigm case, Ian McEwan's *Solar* mimics the doomed structure of settler colonialism's apocalyptic narratives.<sup>257</sup> In contrast, Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle* imagines the failure that delimits *Solar*'s

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*State of Fear, Odds Against Tomorrow, Flight Behavior, The Collapse of Western Civilization, The Carbon Diaries: 2015, Disasters in the First World*, Kim Stanley Robinson's global warming trilogy, Octavia Butler's Parable series, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Jeff Vandermeer's Southern Reach trilogy, and an uncountable array of others.

<sup>255</sup> Lawrence Buell regards apocalypse as "the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). More recently, Amitav Ghosh calls for more representations of catastrophism such as the environmental apocalypse as a way to address *The Great Derangement*—a failure to fully understand the catastrophic scale and violence of climate change. Ghosh explains this failure in historical terms: "it was exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth's atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered to the human" (66). Though not explicit, Ghosh's point suggests a link between the literary imagination and the socio-political landscapes of what Rob Nixon calls slow violence as well as the temporality of what Andrew McMurry calls the "slow apocalypse" of climate change.

<sup>256</sup> Apocalyptic CliFi has tended to be envisioned as various endings to the infinite growth model synonymous with the consumptive progress of Western culture. For this, CliFi's apocalyptic imagination remains dangerously wedded to Western epistemological structures that justify and erase Indigenous genocide and environmental devastation.

<sup>257</sup> Most critics read *Solar* as either an explicitly apocalyptic novel, or unequivocally engaged with the literary mode in its premise. For examples, see Greg Garrard, Andrew Tate, and all book reviews featured by *The Guardian*.

system as belonging to a multiverse of narrative creation. Apocalypse narratives can reenact the structures of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism, as in the case of *Solar*, or survive beyond them, as in King's novel. Together, these novels help us articulate ways climate fiction can amplify the structural analysis needed from the genre. They show how even apocalyptic CliFi can cultivate a social imaginary of survivance beyond the troubling limits of western literary genre, epistemologies, and genocidal systems. These novels help articulate a form of adaptation and prevention that both survives *and* resists the structural violences of climate change.

### ***Solar* and Settler Apocalypse**

The broader genre of apocalypse is born out of the same colonial and capitalist epistemologies associated with the anthropocentric Western literary tradition that Amitav Ghosh, among others, recently credited with the lead role in CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism's tragedy.<sup>258</sup> Indeed, apocalyptic stories often remain inside CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism's choking atmosphere, naturalizing US settler colonial capitalism as seemingly ubiquitous, like the air we breathe. *Solar* is exemplary of the ways environmental apocalypse narratives can assume an atmosphere that erases structures of power, thus reinforcing the anthropocentric CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism at the root of climate change's attendant apocalyptic realities. In this way, *Solar* is a consummate study in the ways apocalyptic narratives suffocate in the "settler atmospherics" of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism (Simmons). Cultural anthropologist Kristen Simmons uses the term settler atmospherics to refer to the logics of settler colonialism suffusing our social relations. While Simmons does not explicitly connect her term to climate change, *Solar* does. The novel narrates to precision the asphyxiating atmospherics associated with the social relations of settler capitalism.

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<sup>258</sup> See Ghosh's indictment of literary anthropocentrism in *The Great Derangement*.

*Solar* was expanded from McEwan's short story "The Boot Room," inspired by McEwan's experience with the Cape Farewell project in Antarctica. The boot room functions as a metaphoric thread through the first third of the novel—a vitally ordered space in a hostile environment, where every person has exactly enough to survive. Quickly, one misplaced piece of gear leads to a room strewn with mismatched supplies. No one attempts to re-establish order. This scene has often led critics to read the boot room as a comic allegory for a seemingly universal deterioration of personal responsibility, the chaos incited by human need and greed, and the "doomed" nature of humanity because of "our" solipsism.<sup>259</sup> As with this scene, the novel as a whole declines to imagine apocalyptic disaster events, even the microcosmic ones, as capable of inciting change. Instead, *Solar* is marked, in content, character, and form, by failure. Language fails, the antihero fails, and the novel fails to imagine anything outside of the narrative patterns of anthropocentric, CO<sub>2</sub>lonial epistemologies.

*Solar*'s failure is precisely its point. *Solar*'s failure captures the slow apocalypse of anthropogenic climate crisis by attending to the ways settled (settler) future is tightly fastened to misogyny, capitalism, colonialism, and the political economics of scientific research. This is *Solar*'s most powerful contribution to the modern CliFi canon: its deft portrayal of the crisis of imagination belonging to white supremacy, exposing the role its anthropocentric Western literary traditions play in CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism's tragedy. Specifically, the novel exemplifies the ways in which narrative—especially stories that make recourse to apocalypse—can consume an individual so thoroughly as to deny that very complicity. In this way, the novel offers a meta-commentary on the apocalypse genre as often

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<sup>259</sup> See Greg Garrard, Heather Houser, Richard Kerridge.

gravitationally bound to anthropocentric solar system associated with the subjectivity of its main character, Michael Beard. *Solar* exemplifies how this subjectivity continues to forestall action on climate change by using narratives of slow apocalypse to make disaster seem unavoidable.

*Solar* is as much invested in the antihero as a proxy for modern subjectivity as it is the role of narrative in forestalling real apocalyptic transformation. Indeed, the entire arc of the novel is loyal to a satirical regard for apocalypse narratives. The novel traces Michael Beard, a presumptuous philanderer, compulsive overeater, and self-consumed Nobel Laureate in physics.<sup>260</sup> The novel's intensely limited third person consistently figures Beard as a synecdoche for the consumptive habits of the human race. More precisely, Michael Beard epitomizes a culture of "hyper abundance" that Frederick Buell notes defines the already increasing ecological risk of slow apocalypse (202). Further, Beard represents a very particular subjectivity in the era of climate change—a subject that responds to apocalyptic stories of ecological catastrophe with a conscious certainty that the end of the world looms. Early in the novel, Beard explicitly ties apocalypse stories to the stasis around modern climate crisis:

the wild commentary that suggested the world was in 'peril', that humankind was drifting towards calamity ... suggested a deep and constant inclination, enacted over the centuries, to believe that one was always living at the end of days, that one's own demise was urgently bound up with the end of the world, and therefore made more sense, or was just a little less irrelevant. The end of the world was never pitched in the present, where it could be seen for the fantasy it was, but just around the corner. (McEwan 18)

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<sup>260</sup> Other apt descriptors include "pathetic, gruff... repulsive in his smugness, greed, obsession with sex, intellectual laziness" (Książopolska 281); and "An overweight, sybaritic, narcissistic Nobel Prize winning physicist, well past his prime, whose main interest seems to be getting married and having affairs. He's the Ignatius Reilly of climate science, though not as principled" (Atcheson).

Beard astutely warns of the dangers of understanding climate change through stories of apocalypse. The novel echoes Beard's criticism, a succinct albeit sardonic summary of what critics of catastrophism make abundantly clear—that apocalyptic tropes often serve to pacify rather than mobilize. Recent work in the politics of collapse and climate change shows that appeals to catastrophe, apocalyptic doom, and the like “can be paralyzing, not mobilizing” (x). Doug Henwood attributes this paralysis to the fact that apocalyptic appeals “have their natural terrain in the right, which is all about natural limits (rather than social ones), great chains of being (with God at the top and the poor at the bottom, enjoying the suffering that is their lot in life), and punishment meted out for our sinful ways” (xii).

The apocalyptic story of catastrophe is a conservative power consolidator, a profit generator. Its primary mode is fear, which “is not a stable place to organize a radical politics,” Eddie Yuen reminds us in his study of the environmental movement and catastrophism, but “can be a very effective platform from which to launch a campaign of populist xenophobia or authoritarian technocracy under the sign of scarcity” (20). Indeed, the singular catastrophe narrated in many apocalyptic narratives is easily made into a profitable ideology for global capital. Slavoj Žižek follows Naomi Klein to warn that, “global capitalism exploits catastrophes (wars, political crises, natural disasters) to get rid of ‘old’ social constraints and impose its agenda on the ‘clean slate’ created by the disaster” (329). The novel's apocalyptic rhetoric performs its own critique – the tropes forestall any real change by narrating a crisis as always just around the corner. Instead, what should be a moment of transformation is perpetually postponed through the very

narrative that should inspire the transformation. Ultimately, Beard's moment of cultural criticism is the paradigm moment of the meta-commentary of the novel.

*Solar's* system revolves on an axis of forever-forestalled transformation, an evasion epitomized in a greasy incident regarding potato chips, or crisps. The crisps incident occupies the very center of the novel and the event's reappearance in the novel mimics the evasive trajectory of many apocalypse narratives. On the train to give a talk, Beard opens what he thinks are his bag of crisps. A man sitting opposite Beard helps himself to some. The two men stare at each other in a silent stand off, each reaching for crisp after crisp until the bag is empty. It is not until Beard leaves the train and reaches into his pocket that he discovers *his* bag of chips. Swallowing his indignation at the stranger's effrontery, Beard realizes it was he who was the thief. At the moment of revelation, the narration—focalized through Beard—considers it the “moment that would remain with him and come to stand for every recalculation he would ever make about his past, every revised or improved perspective he would ever gain on his own history, his own stupidity and other people's motives” (McEwan 145). Beard feels himself, “quite mistakenly, intensely illuminated,” and never articulates his offense (Ibid., 146). In spite of its immediate turning-point language, its reflectively articulated moral, and the apocalyptic-allegory's appearance four times in the novel, the crisps incident inspires no discernable behavioral or psychological change in Beard. Nor does it disrupt, shift, or slow the trajectory of shameful consumptive global crisis that the novel takes as its gravitational core. Instead, Beard capitalizes on the narrative value of this apocalyptic revelation, ensuring actual transformation remains “just around the corner” (Ibid., 146).

Indeed, the novel disrupts any sustained belief in Beard's supposed revelation by linking Beard's lack of transformation to whitewashing histories of racial genocide. In the cab on the way to give his talk, the narrative flashes back to a panel discussion between Beard and a Science Studies scholar. Beard rejects the Science Studies scholar's insistence on the culturally inscribed values embedded in scientific research. Instead he explains the lack of women in physics may be because "the brains of men and women were significantly different" (Ibid., 158). Beard's claim leads the press to liken Beard to a "fanatical sociobiologist whose ideas about gender difference were shown to be indirectly derived from social Darwinism, which in turn spawned Third Reich race theories" (Ibid., 158). The narrative emphasizes the particular news story that links Beard's scientific universalism to racial genocide. This connection makes Beard exemplary of the "settler colonial racial science" used to justify racial genocide, an explanatory frame that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang identify as logic used to secure settler innocence (32). This interlude makes clear that scientific universalism that claims all humans are equally guilty is, in Hannah Arendt words, "a highly effective whitewash of all those who had actually done something, for where all are guilty no one is" (21).<sup>261</sup> The interlude discloses scientific universalism to be a mode of securing innocence.

This interlude implicitly links the language of settler colonial racial science to similar universalizations in discourse responding to climate change. Universals are frequently used to describe humans as a cancer whose natural teleology is the total apocalyptic destruction of climate change. These universals erase histories of genocidal violences through the same universal language as was used to justify them in the first

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<sup>261</sup> For the environmental implications of such universal language, see Mick Smith *Against Ecological Sovereignty*.

place. Moreover, this interlude contrasts the stubbornly bigoted Beard with the intense illumination he experienced only moments before, reminding readers that stories of revelation are often used to secure the subject position that Beard represents, rather than transform it.

The chain of narratives dealing with the crisps incident offer a template for how narratives of revelation can be marshaled to postpone transformation, first through universalization. The moment of transformation becomes a universal lesson on climate change that secures the status quo. Once at his talk, Beard retells the story of the crisps incident to a group of institutional investors. Beard casts the incident as a universal lesson to inform global (capital) climate change adaptation. The moment before he begins his talk parroting Al Gore's phrase, "the planet is sick," Beard figures as a similarly unhealthy synecdoche because of the "stagnant estuary, decaying gaseously" in his stomach (McEwan 180). Beard swallows his nausea and declares:

What I discovered in Paddington Station was, first, that in a grave situation, a crisis, we understand, sometimes too late, that it is not in other people or in the system or in the nature of things that the problem lies, but in ourselves, our own follies and unexamined assumptions. And second, there are moments when the acquisition of new information forces us to make a fundamental reinterpretation of our situation. Industrial civilization is at just such a moment. We pass through a mirror, everything is transformed, the old paradigm makes way for the new. (McEwan 180)

His speech, concluding with the words "the old paradigm makes way for the new," is silently punctuated by Beard's regurgitation—he "bent double while his burden, well lubricated by fish oil, slid soundlessly from him" (Ibid., 180). Though the incident is described with the flair of apocalyptic revelation and is said to be transformative—it literally culminates in something old making space for something new—actual transformation remains unenvisioned in the novel. Beard's individual experience is



extrapolated into a universal allegory that only works *as a fictional* green face for capitalism. Beard takes his individual experience as a universal allegory for climate change adaptation, capitalizing on a stories of transformation but refusing the actual transformation required by the historical and cultural violences of capitalism.

The third appearance of the incident highlights how stories of apocalyptic transformation secure settler futurity, even in narratives of climate change. Soon after he quietly vomits, a folklorist interprets Beard's narrative (Ibid., 169). The folklorist, who is "interested in the forms of narrative that climate science has generated," tells Beard that his is a familiar tale of the "Unwitting Thief." According to the folklorist, this tale is one version of many "narrative subtypes of blameless theft" which "acts as an unconscious corrective" to "anxiety and guilt about our hostility toward minorities" (Ibid., 182). The folklorist's analysis of "blameless theft" aligns Beard's story with what Tuck and Wayne Yang's call a settler move to innocence—a narrative that reconciles settler guilt to secure settler futurity (3). Here, Beard's story is interpreted as an example of how stories, or "forms of story that climate science has generated," are used to deny responsibility. Beard rebuffs the assertion that "people localize and authenticate the story ... they claim copyright" by doing just that, insisting that, "my experience belongs to me, not the collective bloody unconscious" (McEwan 183). In this moment, Beard underwrites his claims to personal copyright, choosing again solipsism over revelation.

Thus, the crisps incident highlights the ways that narratives of transformation often initiate new beginnings that deny history, responsibility, and blame—all moves to innocence replicated in universalist projections of climate change futures. Indeed, if the folklorist were to interpret Beard's story in relation to narratives generated by climate

science, they might conclude that though scientific evidence shows climate change affects marginalized groups sooner and more severely, the revelations that Western science may provide can be used to deny historically and culturally specific blame. The climate change refrain of “we are all implicated” takes on insidious implications when amplified by historical context.

Fourth and finally, the novel offers a summation of apocalyptic transformation tailored, as it too often is, to settler social capital. Beard performs the story for his latest girlfriend, and unapologetically leans in to his “desire to tell an after-dinner anecdote,” and “with a feel for narrative art, Beard suppressed any detail that might have anticipated and diminished the moment of revelation” (McEwan 208, 209). The initial incident on the train is further reduced, here to a mere performance used to build social capital through the story of apocalyptic transformation. In this final reduction, *Solar* satirically parallels the failure of Beard’s private life and the public nature of the climate crisis in a way that reveals the inadequacy of such universal allegorization. Instead, the universal subject assumed in most CliFi, especially apocalyptic CliFi, belongs to system particular to the world *Solar* imagines.

This may be why *Solar*’s satire is not pleurably funny, which may be entirely the point. *Solar* is uncomfortable, unsettling, even nauseating. It makes the reader, like Beard at the end of his “inspirational” speech, sick. It mimics the complex consumption patterns—historical and social—of environmental destruction and their attendant narrative strategies. In this, Beard is a proxy for the “master” in what Lawrence Buell calls the “master metaphor” of environmental apocalypse (285). *Solar* exposes universalism as a

mask for the systems of CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism and Western anthropocentrism, making *Solar* a paradigmatic satirical allegory of settler apocalypse.

### **Apocalypse and Erasure**

*Solar* exemplifies how narratives that imagine catastrophic climate change through the lens of the apocalypse genre are often complicit in an erasure of the history of settler colonialism. Apocalyptic environmental futures often make histories of power irrelevant. They constrict our imagination to claims that climate change will supposedly be like nothing we have ever experienced before, ignoring the many already crying “I can’t breathe.” In this, narratives of apocalyptic environmental events totalize and shelter a very particular “we” that maps onto geographies of power, and are thus prone to protect the violent pollutions of exhaustive, exhausting, and extractive logics that we need them to dismantle. This erasure is particularly relevant to discourse around the Anthropocene, discourse that is often inseparable from, or in concert with, apocalyptic imagination of climate change, and that “speciously universalizes a set of environmental anxieties that is in fact particular to white settler society” ignoring the many who have lived, and are living, through end-of-the-world scenarios (Seraphin 144).

Proposed alternatives to the term Anthropocene suggest that the name, geologic or not, only serves as a valuable marker if it helps interrogate the aligning actualities of racialization, colonialism, capitalism, and ecocide.<sup>262</sup> Some have suggested terms that position the Anthropocene within the atmospheres of what George Yancy calls the

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<sup>262</sup> Debates around the term have suggested more targeted nomenclature like capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene, and many others, the most recent of which is the eugenicine, offered by David Shane Lowry to denote “the period during which policies and products of corporations and government work in tandem to systematically abandon and manipulate the lives of marginalized human communities.” Additionally, Nicholas Mirzoeff’s “White Supremacy Scene” offers, along with Lowry’s term, a productive answer to Heather Davis and Zoe Todd’s recent article on decolonizing the Anthropocene.

“white-world-making” of western epistemologies and social structures (10).<sup>263</sup> These endeavors unsettle an epistemological and systemic position that cannot imagine solving a problem any other way than cataclysmic redemption of a settled (settler) future, which is another form of the all-too familiar acquittal of white violence.

Likewise, apocalypse stories are not just a way to conceptualize the unpredictable futures of climate change; they are a way to understand the historical and current realities of settler colonialism.<sup>264</sup> Many Native communities in the United States and Canada already live “what our ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future” (Whyte 207). When we venture into landscapes of disaster, displacement, and ends-of-worlds, we necessarily enter the uncomfortable spaces epitomized by Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd’s questions regarding the political stakes of the apocalyptic Anthropocene:

What does it mean to have a reciprocal discourse on catastrophic end times and apocalyptic environmental change in a place where, over the last five hundred years, Indigenous peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions? What does it mean to hold, in simultaneous tension, stories of the Anthropocene in the past, present, and future?.

Todd’s questions clarify the dystopic landscapes of the Anthropocene as the grounds of settler colonial capitalism’s genocidal project repopulated by enslavement-produced capital, sites of past and persistently in-progress apocalyptic structures tied to ownership of the land and what and how it produces. *Solar* exemplifies the tendency of apocalyptic tales to ignore Todd’s structural analysis, remaining blinded by the *anthropos* associated

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<sup>263</sup> In his unpublished dissertation, Taylor McHolm draws on Yancy’s term to describe an “inverse albedo effect” as the ways the Anthropocene reflects whiteness. McHolm, “Representational,” 115.

<sup>264</sup> See Whyte, Dillon, Risling-Baldy.

with settler subjectivity. Through its many failures, the novel demands that this “old paradigm” must make “way for the new,” that we imagine beyond the western, white-world-making that many want the term Anthropocene to more clearly signify (McEwan 180). The novel shows, then, that CliFi must see beyond the solipsistic settler subjectivity narrated by *Solar*—beyond the western epistemologies and social structures that cannot imagine solving a problem any other way than cataclysmic redemption of a settled (settler) future (another form of the all-too familiar acquittal of white violence). *Solar* teaches that CliFi must instead imagine failure as an opportunity, the origin story of and for a response-able readership.

### ***The Back of the Turtle and Radical Apocalypse***

Thankfully, the CliFi novel is not limited to these Western anthropocentric apocalyptic structures. As recent debates over the term Anthropocene remind us, Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been experiencing environmental collapse for over 500 years, making their conceptions of apocalypse and survival not just more materially informed, but more politically and epistemologically exigent, more radically engaged. Vizenor’s reminder that “Native philosophies and radical turns in epistemology have developed at critical moments in the individual, visionary, and communal experiences of natives in the colonial and egalitarian world” is especially important for climate fiction (“Trickster”). As exemplar, First Nations Cherokee Thomas King’s first novel in 20 years is a novel written in hopes of marshalling concern for environmental destruction. Read as apocalyptic climate fiction, the novel shows the slow apocalypses of settler-colonial capitalism to be multiple, urgent, and full of potential. Like *Solar*, *The Back of the Turtle* takes on the politics of literary genre in relation to climate change,

science, and capital. But, where *Solar* ends, *The Back of the Turtle* begins. In this, King's novel emphasizes the importance of survivance as an ecological mode that can inform CliFi's apocalyptic imagination.

Like *Solar*, King's *The Back of the Turtle* is invested in the radical power of apocalyptic stories, our relations to them, and their real world corollaries. King's novel places environmental apocalypse at the fore, as a framework for lived experience that regards calamitous realities to be ever present. The novel plays with names, genocidal histories and corporate presence in order to explode any notion that novels are not radically rooted in realities. The story reconfigures SDF15, the chemical compound that could have destroyed all plant life in the world, into GreenSweep, a chemical responsible for the environmental apocalypse preceding the novel referred to as the Ruin. The novel also names its villains: Syngenta, an agribusiness responsible for numerous chemical spills, and Domidion, a fictional company responsible for the Ruin but only a one-letter change from Dominion Power, a Virginia company responsible for massive 2011 and 2016 oil spills.

The novel further blurs the distinction between nonfiction and the novel's world by linking the same politicized hyperobjects that critics use to designate CliFi to specific environmental concerns like the tar sands, chemical spills, the rising rate of autoimmune diseases, genetic modification, and environmental racism all to corporate, settler-, and colonial interests. In more name play, Domidion occupies Tecumseh plaza, a location that unsettles Domidion's claims to dominion by reminding readers of the Shawnee leader who allied Native nations to fight against white settlers. And the novel imagines environmental apocalypse as rooted in the same corporate greed and racial

terror. In the span of two pages, *The Back of The Turtle* references a massive Domidion oil spill, the white-male mass shooting at Sandy Hook, and Nazi genocide and then links them to the logic of alternative facts, because, as Dorian parrots Nazi minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, “If you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes the truth” (King 306). Here, as throughout the novel, the realities of genocide and white male aggression are networked to histories of corporate ecocide and state violence. In his critique of environmental apocalypse discourse, Frederick Buell argues connections like these productively blur “the boundaries between the dilemmas in fiction and dilemmas still very much in progress in the surrounding world” (F. Buell 322). Like *Solar*, *The Back of the Turtle* shows that stories of environmental apocalypse have the power to frame lived experience, highlighting the banality of racial and environmental evils.<sup>265</sup> The novel’s connections are impossible to relegate to mere fiction. Instead, they reveal a complex web of narrative and lived worlds including, but not limited to, settler apocalypse.

Instead of stories of apocalyptic transformation forever-forestalling failure’s consequences, King’s novel assumes apocalypse to be both immanent to settler colonial narrative structure and an opportunity for recreative origin stories. The novel opens as a self-aware creation story. Its first lines read “FIRST LIGHT,” an echo of the Christian “Let there be light,” but a declaration without a declarer. The novel’s first light line is a declaration that literally omits the individual actor, hero, or god of Christian myth. The novel begins as “they sat together” sharing an apple (King 1). The opening scene rebrands the Christian symbol of the fall as instead “the stuff of creation,” a meal to be

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<sup>265</sup> King offers Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil” to explain environmental destruction (“Thomas King Rides”).

relished together (King 1). The novel further flips this order of creation by contrasting the playful prologue with a first chapter that seeds stories of creation in stories of failure, death.

The novel's first chapter begins in a place of failure, a beginning that envisions failure as a concurrent condition of creation. The first scene opens on the main character Gabriel Quinn attempting to drown himself in the sea of his home reserve of Samaritan Bay. Gabriel is the Domidion scientist responsible for GreenSweep, the chemical that killed his entire family and devastated his Samaritan Bay's turtle breeding grounds. Gabriel returns home, aiming to add his body to the other "bleached bodies of barnacles" strewn on the shore (Ibid., 5). The first chapter begins as he wades out to meet his death among the "Apostles," the tall basalt columns visible at low tide that were once covered with sea life (Ibid., 4). Gabriel's suicide attempt is interrupted when he finds a girl floating in the water. He saves the girl and many others by pulling them to the shore; "And then for no reason other than exhaustion and exhilaration, he began to sing. Not the memorial song. A grass dance this time. A fierce song. A song for warriors. For now he knew these people. They were the sea people. The first people" (Ibid., 9). Here, in the midst of claiming "Now I am become death," Gabriel is saved by saving "The first people," whom he recognizes through traditional practice (Ibid. 9). From the openings, the novel merges apocalyptic tropes from dissonant traditions.

The novel goes further to trace apocalyptic myths and catastrophic realities as they are folded into Native creation myths. Following the Ruin, Gabriel leaves a folder that repeats a list of events Gabriel has left enigmatically written on the wall of his bungalow: "Chernobyl. Idaho Falls. Chalk River... Nuclear and biological waste



dumps... Bhopal. Grassy Narrows” (Ibid. 23-24). For a list of such devastating events, the folder is seemingly contrarily titled: *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*. *The Back of the Turtle* sets its title in a place of creation, where alliances are built by the most doubted of all animals, the muskrat, an animal who dies once he brings a bit of dirt from the bottom of the ocean. In these opening examples, the novel declares that “fictional worlds that do not conveniently end with apocalypse” can instead begin there (F. Buell 322). The back of the turtle is a new-out-of-old world, where a fall, a death, and unlikely alliances rebuild by regarding stories as the basic unit of social change.

The novel begins, and then dwells, in this meaning-filled failure: failed suicide, salvation, and salvage. Salvage figures consistently as the paradigm of creation, both as a noun—reclaimed or repurposed discarded objects—and a verb—the act of salvation, redemption, and reclamation. The novel’s post-apocalyptic world is built from salvage, refusing the “clean slate” of apocalypse that many have shown to be ripe for capital’s exploitation. Instead, salvage is a place to begin: “Salvage. I have looked to the water, whence cometh my salvage. Verily, I say, my salvage is at hand. Sonny didn’t think these sayings up by himself. They all come from Dad, and Dad has had him repeat them over and over. In the beginning was salvage” (King 28). Indeed, at the novel’s close, the dog/god has been named Salvage. Salvage, for King’s apocalyptic CliFi, is another way to envision “failure” as opportunity for creation. To reclaim and repurpose is to adapt, to survive. The act of salvation, redemption, and reclamation are acts of resistance, acts of prevention. The novel offers salvage as a way to envision adaptation in the face of climate change, as well as survival and resistance through the systems that have led to its many slow apocalypses. Salvage is the metaphoric message of the novel’s survivance.

The novel envisions survival of more than the singular antihero associated with Western anthropocentric literary convention. It multiplies the singular antihero into three complexly antiheroic characters. First, Dorian Asher is a more grey (ash-er) version of Dorian Grey, the narcissistic Western literary figure who—like Beard—obsessively avoids a portrait that mirrors his sins back to him. As Domidion’s CEO, Dorian epitomizes the insatiability of Western capitalism, feverishly shopping to avoid his growing “propensity to see catastrophes in canaries” (King 12). Dorian also represents the culturally lethal logic of Western scientific progress, emphasizing the link between “culture” as the biological, i.e. what is grown in the Petri dish, and the social customs of a people: Dorian muses that, “It was one of the small ironies of biology that an organism designed to increase crop production could also be modified to destroy nations” (Ibid., 22). In this sly, pun-y allegory, the novel links a culture of corporate science, capitalism, and nationalism to cultural genocide.

Yet Dorian is driven by the sole-desire to salvage his own success, his own corporate survival, making him much like Beard, a paradigm of settler subjectivity. Dorian’s foil in the novel presents a more hopeful version of the anti-hero. Gabriel is the character most reflective of the political, economic, and corporate histories tied up in Western science. Yet, as Nicholas Crisp tells us, Gabriel is named for “The one chosen to announce the birth of John the Baptist and to reveal the Qur’an to Muhammad. It’s Gabriel what tells Mary about the road ahead” but also that “Dante made Gabriel the chief of the angelic guards placed at the entrance to paradise” and “there’s a movie called *Constantine* what has a Gabriel who betrays heaven and joins forces with the Dark Lord...And now, at the meridian of the world, on this seal-piss and foggy-dog of a day,

here stands another Gabriel, rigged for battle and havoc” (Ibid., 35-36). Instead of a one-to-one allegorical relationship, Gabriel reflects a fun-house mirror of Western myth, science, and possibility for story to change any character’s trajectory.

Fragmenting the singular anti-hero even further, Nicholas Crisp offers a more productively ambivalent version of Beard’s appetite. Crisp is an enigmatic character that seemingly cannot control his appetite for anything: food and sex, or stories and revelry/revelation. Speaking with the stylings of the King James Bible, Crisp may be associated with the nefarious underworld, as he is keeper of the Dante-esque “nine descending pools” of Beatrice Hot Springs (Ibid., 52). His appetites mirror his ambivalent allusive ties. Yet he is clearly a caretaker, watching out for all those who have returned to Samaritan Bay. The novel shatters Western literary convention, refusing the binaries of individual hero or anti-, recasting the stars of the story as salvaged from various flaws and potentialities. The novel entrusts the alter-abled Sonny, a timid figure who combs the seashore for salvage, as a creator and protector in the novel. Sonny also tends the Ocean Star Motel, a run-down business with the motto, “Follow the Star.” Sonny makes the motto material when he builds a beacon that guides life back to the reserve at the novel’s close. The novel’s unlikely (and, for Western literary convention, unheroic) heroes epitomize the importance of salvage for thinking about survival and resistance in the context of climate change. In the context of climate change, survival, resistance, adaptation, and prevention will together demand a new world built out of the old.

The novel’s narrative instability emphasizes the importance of salvage for community survivance. The novel manifests a self-conscious regard for the instability and power of language and narrative, weaving fragments of different mythic traditions

together with the narratives associated with media outlets, corporate commodification, and scientific research. Further, its allusions to Shakespeare, *Inuiticus*, the Bible, Dante, and its countless puns, all work together to salvage, or recover, acts of survivance through narrative play. Indeed, the novel's narrative instability is itself a discourse of survivance, revealing how "language functions performatively to actively organize knowledge of ourselves and our world; this discursive performance is participatory, multiple and never fixed, always already in creative transformation" (Madsen 14). Stylistically, the third person limited narrative voice shifts in language, rhythm, and tone according to which of the five characters focuses the chapter. The novel envisions a community recovered by individuals who do not share a single voice, a disparate but cooperative vision that defines survivance in the novel. The novel's world is made through instability—through the polyvocal practices of survivance, an active sense of presence over absence found in the novel's form and content.

The *Woman Who Fell From the Sky* stories the novel's theory of community survivance. In the novel, *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* is a story about the beginning of a world out of a fall. It begins as a woman falls from the upper world to "a world with naught but water," is caught by the birds' wings and safely set down on the back of a turtle only to discover she is pregnant (King 224). The animals gather to build land, but it is muskrat, who "weren't the biggest nor the swiftest," who dies bringing the necessary paw-full of mud to the surface (King 233). Then, on the back of the turtle, the woman gives birth to twins, one who makes world comfortable and another who messes it all up. The two creation stories are juxtaposed to show that "here are our choices: a world in which creation is a solitary, individual act or a world in which creation is a

shared activity; a world that begins in harmony and slides toward chaos or a world that begins in chaos and moves toward harmony; a world marked by competition or a world determined by cooperation” (*Truth* 24-25). Instead of a static notion of ‘reconciliation’ that is often a proxy for assimilation into a monologic world (the world that Dorian embodies), *The Back of the Turtle* envisions reconciliation as a verb—an active constitution of a multifaceted community. Unlike the monologue of Christianity’s creation story, *The Back of the Turtle* is a story that, as Crisp says, “comes with the land, and the two are forever wedded” (King 222). Thus, the novel’s survivance resides in an Indigenous-centered, precarious “practice, not an ideology, dissimulation or theory” where the reader is a co-creator in the meaning making process (*Native Liberty* 11). *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* and *The Back of the Turtle* offer complex commentaries on how stories create us and how we create through story.

Vizenor and King’s regard for the co-creative nature of narrative is especially generative for thinking about apocalyptic CliFi. Instead of the tragic apocalypse of settler colonialism where the state of emergency supplants real transformation, the novel’s most hopeful community is defined by active process. Community is always in the process of being built from salvaged odds and ends, parts that “should not necessarily fit together” (“Thomas King Rides”). These reclaimed remnants remain in the midst of past, present, and future apocalyptic scenarios, exemplifying what scholars like Kyle Powys Whyte show – that Native peoples have much experience surviving what they would regard as their “Ancestors’ Dystopian Now” (2). Indeed, King’s novel imagines the “often-protracted, difficult and frequently unrewarding work of building radical mass movements” that critics of apocalypse have called for instead (Lilley 76). Thus, the

novel's survivance provides "a powerful strategy for subverting monologic U.S. colonial structures of oppression," especially tragic stories of settler apocalypse (Madsen 14). Settler apocalypse stories promote a tragic vision—a lonely anthropocentric state of exception where no transformation will ever really satisfy, where catastrophe is construed to secure settler status quo. Instead, *The Back of the Turtle* offers a comic survivance that uses apocalyptic tropes to describe catastrophe as multiple, discomfiting, and part of historical and ongoing processes. King's novel rewrites the tragic vision of Richard H. Pratt's "Kill the Indian, save the man" to assert we must "unsettle the settler, save the collective life." In this, King's CliFi asks that we actively reflect and reclaim the kinds of community our every day actions create or destroy.

The novel's survivance asks readers to salvage their own agency, their own capacity for adaptation. The novel narrativizes King's refrain: "Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (*Truth* 29). Indeed, King's novel emphasizes "that we don't doesn't mean we can't, we just haven't yet" ("Thomas King Rides"). The novel locates part of the work of salvaging firmly in the realm of stories—stories are how we avert disaster because we are built out of destruction ("Thomas King Rides"). The novel concludes in the messy place of creation, a place prophesized early in the tale, as "The beginning of days. The Indians have arrived. Soon the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and the animals, big and small, will come home two by two" (King 104). They do—the novel finds the turtles returning to breed as "signs of resurrection at the edges of the desolation," life returning at the edges of the desolation of settler colonial capitalism (King 344).

*The Back of the Turtle* makes clear that settler colonialism's insatiable desire for land to extract, exploit, endanger, and capitalize is an ongoing process that is often understood through the framework of apocalypse. The novel forges connections between land, extraction, exploitation, genocide, and apocalypse that are impossible to relegate to inconsequential fiction, especially for anyone concerned with the efficacy of climate fiction. We've heard it now. We must continue to hear it and attempt to act in the midst of these slow apocalyptic realities that shape imaginations. It is this regard for salvage that points to the value of Vizenor's notion of survivance for articulating ways that narrative can unsettle the forces driving climate change. Vizenor's survivance helps CliFi's narrative imaginations include adaptation and prevention, survival and resistance, salvaged from the wreckage of genocidal settler colonial structures. King's novel salvages some of the most compelling elements of *Solar* in ways that exemplify the relevance of Vizenor's survivance for an engaged and efficacious environmental literature.

Though not meant as a tool to address or inform the climate change debate, or even its literary correlate, Gerald Vizenor's notion of "survivance" emphasizes how the act of unsettling can cultivate ethical and active resistance at both the linguistic and material level. Survivance connotes dynamic survival of the human and nonhuman world through simultaneous acts of linguistic deconstruction and creation of an implicated, and thus more ethical, readership. Thinking about CliFi's desire to mobilize its readership, Vizenor's notion seems crucial for CliFi narratives that work toward these ends. If we regard both CliFi novels as test cases, we can articulate the ways literature can reify or challenge the genocidal forces driving climate change. Indeed, both novels describe

coming to terms with climate change as a problem of the past and present, avoiding the ahistorical future-projection that many have criticized in much of CliFi. Additionally, both novels narrate the complex political and capital realities of scientific and climate change research. Moreover, both novels use apocalyptic tropes to interrogate anthropocentric “success” and its contemporary capital-friendly geo-engineered iteration. They both avoid the disaster-event scenario so troublingly at work in the apocalypse genre, and instead represent a slow, structurally apocalyptic fall.

### **Survivance Ecology and Climate Fiction**

In their own ways, both novels index the vitality of Vizenor’s notion of survivance for imagining social survival and resistance that attend to the settler colonial capitalist roots of climate change, science, energy policy and practices, and literary genre. I propose the term survivance ecology as a set of characteristics based on Vizenor’s term that are vital for environmental literature.<sup>266</sup> These novels suggest key elements of survivance ecology to be found in anti-heroes marked by failure and driven by unchecked hunger, a desire to break rules of literary genre in order to draw attention to the instability of narrative, a regard for language as a self-conscious act, and a hailing of the reader in the story’s meaning making process. Moreover, both offer comic critiques of the structures of CO2lonialism, structures whose natural terrain binds environmental and racial concerns to the tragic mode. Both novels offer critiques of the insatiability of capitalism, its relationship to scientific research, and our own anti-heroic narrative natures. They both draw attention to narrative as a political act that involves the reader.

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<sup>266</sup> Survivance ecology signals the ways Vizenor’s term can augment Murray Bookchin’s “social ecology” which theorizes an alternative non-hierarchical social by highlighting the bodies that capitalist economies are built upon. Ecology also invokes Bruno Latour’s “political ecology” that takes the “enigma of scientific production” as its core and “collective experimentation as its aim” (4).



They both address systemic, networked causes of environmental devastation through metanarrative irony. And they both offer versions of apocalyptic narratives that avoid many of the problems associated with apocalypse and the environmental imagination.

Though both novels suggest some of these survivance ecology characteristics, only *The Back of the Turtle* dramatizes the ways imagination and debate around climate change can escape the particular anthropocentrism of capital and colonial conquest. In this, King's novel looks beyond the deconstructive critique offered in *Solar* to salvage an apocalyptic imagination for climate fiction. *The Back of the Turtle* salvages where *Solar* seems to only waste. *The Back of the Turtle* imagines worlds of resistance that escape the solipsistic orbit of *Solar*'s Michael Beard, that breaks the limits of a deconstructive critique absent a vision for action. Thus, *The Back of the Turtle* scopes beyond the particular strain of anthropocentrism often inhibiting CliFi's catastrophic vision. The novel roots survivance in the fecundity of failure, ground from which to salvage, to build, to imagine. Survivance ecology salvages the debate over genre to argue that any climate fiction, apocalyptic or otherwise, must unsettle the social (and material) death that the American apocalypse genre typically naturalizes—both the death of Indigenous peoples and non-human life.

Survivance ecology offers a vital lens for evaluating climate fiction, and a way to articulate apocalyptic tropes in the newly forming genre. Through the lens of survivance ecology, we see how CliFi could envision survival *and* resistance to the systems causing slow, catastrophic realities. This imperative makes CliFi an ideal genre to articulate an ecological vision of survival and resistance, a survivance ecology that represents a set of narrative strategies of survivance vital for environmental literature. Survivance ecology

highlights the politics of literary genre in relation to questions of climate change—calling attention to the political importance of storytelling for energy policy, practices, and scientific research in the context of settler colonial capital. It underscores the importance of imagining outside the realms of western anthropocentrism and its capital-driven catastrophes. Thus, survivance helps articulate why Indigenous voices, and the perspectives of other marginalized groups, must be at the center of environmental movements and imaginations. Survivance ecology shows that CliFi’s desire to narrate coming to terms with climate change cannot be fully realized without addressing systems of violence coterminous with anthropogenic climate change. Exposing the ways in which CO<sub>2</sub> colonialism over-determines scientific research, survivance ecology stresses the importance of salvage, salvaging, and the authority of failure to teach survival and resistance. Survivance ecology offers climate fiction a means of imagining the intersections rooting apocalypse to adaptation, prevention, survival, and resistance.

### **Radical Apocalypse**

Imagining action in the present, amidst apocalyptically charged climate change predictions of the future, takes great capacity for contradiction. To secure a future in which humans and other life can survive, to slow climate change, we have to imagine that the threats of climate change are so dire as to constitute the end of a world.<sup>267</sup> We must do this imagining by acknowledging that climate change is not and will not be a single catastrophic event, though language of catastrophe is often mobilized to explain the ongoing colonization of land, knowledges, and life ways, or to justify killings of the most vulnerable peoples as necessary (or the killers exempt). Instead, environmental crisis has been and will continue to be experienced as a series of slow violences for those most

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<sup>267</sup> Žižek makes just this point in *Living in the End Times*.

vulnerable to, and mostly likely already victimized by, the structures of settler colonial capitalism. In this light, deploying the genre to expose the roots of these structures seems increasingly vital. Stories that help us reimagine worlds outside, before, and beyond such settler-futures have the capacity to mobilize even the most stagnant and settled among us.

Indeed, through the lens of a radical apocalypse, where radical means to get at the root, we uncover the source of violences that share, but often are short-circuited by, the universalizing geographies of the *anthropos*' epochal term. In a timeline that echoes Heather Davis and Zoe Todd's call to source the Anthropocene's inception in the colonial period, Gerald Horne traces the origins of *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* in seventeenth century slavery, white supremacy, and capitalism.<sup>268</sup> So too, Jodi Byrd uses apocalyptic language to define the "zombie imperialism" used "to legitimize and naturalize a social order that included slavery, Indian extermination, and territorial conquest" (228). These scholars use apocalyptic language to clarify the shared radicality, the roots, of more-than-fictional histories of settler colonial conquest. Thus, apocalypse can be used as an oppressive tool of settler colonial capitalist hegemony or a radical means for communicating alternative histories and forwarding revolutionary futures, even amidst climate change. Climate fiction's apocalypse genre holds the potential to unify a national identity, challenge the nature of that nation's unification, or offer radical alternatives to the violent structures of western sovereignty often implicit to representations of climate change. Indeed, using the genre of environmental apocalypse to imagine events yet to come may erase the ways that specific peoples have experienced, survived, adapted, resisted, and frustrated the ecological and humanitarian collapses

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<sup>268</sup> The link is also tellingly insinuated in Horne's citations of Geoffrey Parker's *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change, and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*.

associated with the self-perpetuating pales of a settler *anthropos*. However, radical tales of environmental apocalypse can help us imagine beyond the futures put in motion by people who thought genocide, slavery, and environmental extraction were acceptable social relations.

Literary genre has immense power for shaping not just our imaginations but also our realities. This recognition is the foundation of what science fiction scholar and “How to Survive the End of the World” podcast host adrienne maree brown calls “genrecide”—the intentional blurring of fictional boundaries that shape our worlds (163).<sup>269</sup> Brown argues that what we consider science fiction is happening in real time in communities who are working to create systems of justice and equity in the future (160). The present-now of science fiction that Brown articulates is a type of “visionary fiction” that works toward human and nonhuman survival through apocalypses of the past, present, and future.<sup>270</sup> This vision of survivance offers a form of time travel inspired, too, in continuity with a profound range of contemporary scholars. Zoe Todd (anthropology), Kyle Powys Whyte (philosophy), and Grace Dillon (English) and others all separately emphasize that Indigenous peoples are experienced survivors of the past and ongoing apocalypse of settler colonial capitalism.<sup>271</sup> Additionally, recent work in Black and ethnic studies articulates settler colonialism as a set of technologies aimed at dispossession which communities of color have been outlasting for centuries (la paperson 10).

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<sup>269</sup> In his critique of environmental apocalypse discourse, Frederick Buell agrees that to blur “the boundaries between the dilemmas in fiction and dilemmas still very much in progress in the surrounding world” is one way to affect a more just and sustainable world (322).

<sup>270</sup> Maree brown defines emergent strategy through a synthesis of Octavia Butler’s fiction, the work of activist organizers, and non-human movement relations like flocking and fungal networks

<sup>271</sup> See chapter 3 for detailed list of these scholars.

Where settler states of emergency rely on disaster events to suspend or postpone the end of white sovereignty, radical apocalypse situates past, present, and future disasters within a space-time continuum of revolutionary survivance. Author of *M Archive: After the End of the World*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, explains this continuity as “black feminist time travel” in a podcast episode that likens this space-time agility to being “like seeds.” Yet, Gumbs liberates the terrestrial linearity of colonial imaginations by describing a time and space continuum where those seeking social justice now draw on the strength of people like Harriet Tubman, who used her imagination of the freedom that many experience today to survive and free others. This profound reframing of temporality and continuance is encapsulated in Fred Moten’s insistence that what “survives dispossession, is therefore before dispossession” (241). In the midst of the simultaneous apocalypses of settler colonialism, literary scholars like Moten and Gumbs show multitudes living and imagining outside of that space-time. While the settler form of the apocalypse genre is typically limited to a linear trajectory involving the end of a (white) world, the genre can also reflect and radically transform lived realities, can move our imaginations through and indeed beyond the whitewashed horizons of settler time and space.

When we recognize the history of whole worlds of both literary and lived apocalypses, we see how the genre of apocalypse structures our traumatic realities and how it can be used to help us imagine worlds more just, more abundant, and more resurgent than our own. By regarding genre as both ideological and material, we are able to better address the shared nature of what some have deemed a contemporary “crisis of imagination”—what Frederic Jameson and Amitav Ghosh, respectively, have referenced

as the supposedly pervasive failure to conceive the end of capitalism or the full implications of climate change. We can articulate how climate fiction can be used to variously encode and inscribe or challenge and unsettle the authority of settler colonial capitalism's racial hierarchy and environmental exploitation. Such attention to the material and historical politics of literary genre attunes us to ways apocalyptic climate fiction can articulate a structural critique that builds antiracist environmental imaginations, narrative and otherwise.

Climate fiction's apocalyptic narratives must radically interrogate what apocalypse tales typically index: the racial and environmental extraction veiled in the histories and myths of settler colonial capital. This recognition asks scholars in the environmental humanities to attend to the pun emergent in, and at the root of, Lawrence Buell's characterization of the environmental apocalypse as a "master metaphor." As history shows, apocalypse can *reveal* or *uncover* the legacy of conquest inhered in apocalypse narratives, can unveil the whiteness of the master often rooted in the metaphor. Where apocalyptic disaster events reinforce structures of racial violence and environmental destruction, radical stories of structural apocalypse can adjust our temporalities beyond the pale horizons built by settler colonial capital. Within such a time travel continuum, a vibrant antiracist and decolonial environmentalism emerges for climate fiction to narrate.

The narrative problems of climate change are matters of the imagination and of the material world. These stories show us that if we do the radical work of grasping the roots of the problems that shade us, problems that both regard us with disrespect *and* provide us shelter, we can write ourselves into the future. We can articulate which worlds

we want to end, hasten those endings, and fantasize about which worlds we want to work to imagine and to create. If we keep listening to those people and traditions that have been fighting these systems since their beginnings, we can confront the pasts that made the present possible, and project beyond them. Let us all work to lift up climate fiction that helps us imagine these emergent, and urgent, time machines.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Special thanks to Stephanie LeMenager's Cultures of Climate course, especially the intellectual generosity of Taylor McHolm, Shane Hall, and Elizabeth Curry, as well as conversations outside of the course with Kyle Powys Whyte and Bruno Seraphin.

## CHAPTER VII

### CODA: CHANGING WEATHER, CHANGING IMAGINATIONS

“There isn’t enough, so we need to hoard, enclose, divide, fence up, and prioritize resources and people. We have to imagine beyond those fears.”  
– adrienne maree brown, 18

Climate change is a narrative issue as well as a scientific one. It is narrative problem that adrienne maree brown finds defined by fears that constrict our imaginations to fenced horizons. This project shows these same enclosures limiting our imaginations are also the failures that many have diagnosed in our current moment: the failure to imagine the scales and temporalities of climate change, the end of capitalism, the actionable methods of land repatriation and reparations. These are narrative problems. And as we have seen, they are narrative problems that have a lot to do with the ways whiteness is rooted deep into the American environmental imagination. Yet, they are narrative problems that we must do more than diagnose. As brown’s imperative implores of us, we must identify the causes and, if we want to build a different world, we must cultivate our imaginations with something other than the artistry of those who thought slavery, genocide, and ecocide were acceptable costs for power.

This project insists that the political deadlock in the U.S. regarding climate change and the disturbing rise in popular enthusiasm for white nationalism cannot be engaged separately. They instead converge in the ideas of nature that naturalize whiteness in the environmental imagination. These convergences have been and are now limiting our ability to imagine worlds outside of the extinction-drives associated with climate change. And this project has also shown that we have an abundance of models of how to imagine otherwise. There are stories that are capable of facilitating radical



transformations in our social, political, material, and epistemological worlds. We are, and have been, in a battle of the imagination.<sup>273</sup> And the imagination is how we will win.

This project insists that not only must we identify and uproot the places where white supremacy has burrowed, we must plant and water and tend and cultivate the worlds we want. As we take responsibility for our imaginative becomings, we ensure the survival of our more-than-human communities as family, friends, neighbors, kin. This project proposes that one way to begin this work is by reading for property. It suggests that we can better understand the complicated imbrications of power, racial formation, and environmental extraction by attending to the ways types of stories reflect and respond to crisis moments for the white possessive imagination. This type of reading for property is a mode of unsettling the plots demarcated by Western's sovereignty's white pickets. As literary genre tells us much about how those crisis moments are narrated, canonized, or forgotten, this project analyzes particular genres through a genealogical method to clarify those complex power relations as they are plotted into the environmental imagination.

As a way of reading for property, this genrealogy–genealogy through literary genre–asks how literary genre reveals or contests the naturalization of whiteness and possession, the settler sovereignty that is inseparable from, indeed constitutes, capitalism in all its forms. Genrealogy helps us see the ways that settler sovereignty naturalizes white possession into our environmental imagination, walling off our ideas of what is fiction and what is possible to be fact. It threatens any challenge with the cuts of a thousand petty sovereigns, coiled into the colonial technology of barbed wire.<sup>274</sup> And yet,

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<sup>273</sup> adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha's edited volume of short stories, *Octavia's Brood*, takes this declaration as its premise.

genreology also shows that it could be, has been, and will be otherwise. Just as barbed wire was immediately repurposed to transmit telephone, so, too, genres can be used in excess of colonial projects. “Technologies are the master’s tools,” la paperson reminds readers in *A Third University is Possible*, “and yet they will never be just that” (21). Genres will never be just the plots of white possession. They can cut, bend, upend, repurpose the fences intended to bind us to our deaths. This project uses the genreological method to excavate an early, enduring, exigent, and *unfenced* environmental justice tradition(s) that exceeds and will outlast the settler state.

The texts and tests on the syllabus for the dark ahead must educate us about the larger structures that make it so hard to think outside of settler colonial capitalism and climate change. This project’s archive teaches just that. It reveals that the difficulty of thinking outside these systems is, in some ways, because of the tautology of property, where the lack of a property relation justifies taking land in order to make it property. Property emerging like this, *ex nihilo*, is where the devilishness of whiteness and the American mind rests: whiteness cannot be thought without capitalism, colonialism, and nature; where nature – as we have seen – is mediated by the American environmental imagination, which itself is a product of capital and nation building and the uses to which “nature” can be put for the project of racial formation that stimulates capital accumulation. My mind dizzies in tracing property’s white possessive circle. I still search for a beginning instead of starting from the acknowledged failure to find one. Yet, as this archive shows, there are so many thinkers and stories that can teach us to read for

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<sup>274</sup> In calling barbed wire a colonial technology, I wish to do more than state the obvious. I wish to explicitly connect Rebecca Onion’s exploration of the connection between barbed wire and the rise of white nationalism to BadSalishGirl’s blog post entitled “Barbed Wire Colonialism” where the author describes the titular term as the fencing which keeps her and her family from harvesting traditional foods.

property. Thus, this is both a research project and a pedagogical one. This archive teaches us what genre can do, and what it should do. Ultimately, it shows the pitfalls of framing climate change through the haunting horrors of the gothic, or the universal language of the commons, or the end-of-world imaginations of the apocalypse. And it also reveals how environmental humanities— artists, thinkers, and activists—can deploy these genres to radical ends.

We saw in chapter one that the American gothic is a narrative mode that can reckon with the extractive economies responsible for the current horrors of climate change. It can, too, reinforce the sacredness of settler sovereignty by evading history and coding the nature-as-property equation into our environmental imagination, as with Emerson's *Nature*. Yet, it can also narrate the inherited present-ness of history. It can, as William Apress shows, teach us how to sit with the anguish of historical truth, how to acknowledge the enduring nature of those systems of power, and how to be in relation to the discomfort of our own divergent places within. In our own moment, the environmental justice gothic genre that Apress belongs to can help us sit with the inherited trauma of other human and nonhuman bodies on a dying planet. In that, the gothic suggests one mode of the recognition necessary for healing. It transforms the settler genre into a gothic futurism able to narrate a path of survival through the settler states' death-drives.<sup>275</sup>

The genre of allegory can be used to narrate the commons as a commitment to antiracist, anticolonial environmental justice in action. In the allegory, we find a “we”

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<sup>275</sup> Gothic futurism is a term associated with Rammellzee, a visual artist who used the term to describe the battle between letters and the rules associated with alphabetic standards. In this project, I am taking Rammellzee's term to apply to generic standards and an explicitly environmental justice politics.

which is never stable but often indicates the insidious utopia of a white commons.<sup>276</sup> As with Hawthorne, this utopian imaginary too often rests on plots that bury or erase the genocide and slavery and extraction that its commons are built upon. That version of the commons, so entrenched in the American environmental imagination, upholds a version of sovereignty that is both inside and outside the law, a sovereignty that acquits the settler state of its violences. Yet, as we saw with Melville, the allegory can be used to outline the dystopic, shapeshifting spaces where floats settler capital, anchoring its liberal freedom to the opposite on which it depends. Ridge's novel refuses the propriety associated with the white property proper to the nation. It instead suggests an allegory of white possessive violence that transcends national, and sentimental, borders. In this, the allegory emerges as a genre capable of refusing a commons rooted in English common law, where community is yoked to capital accumulation. Rather, the allegory can common a community based in notions of consent, care, accountability, and reciprocity.<sup>277</sup> This allegorizes a community commons as a verb, performed in the action of building a better world. The allegory is, in this sense, like the gothic, a form of futurism.

The gothic genre can recognize histories as guides for future-building, suggesting futures that can be allegorized in the present through our actions and connecting us to past that narrate how to survive the ends of the worlds. The past, future, and in-progress apocalypses of climate change testify to the imaginative battles that writers like Apess, Ridge, and Pokagon have fought, using genres as a tool to heal dying worlds. As chapter three explored, what world is ending is a question that the apocalyptic narrative answers -

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<sup>276</sup> The we as subject here aims to perform the instability that it diagnoses.

<sup>277</sup> Here, I am drawing on the work of Kyle Powys Whyte who explores the ecological practices of many Indigenous communities as consent-based, reciprocal polities.

whether it be the state of emergency story of apocalyptic events that particular strains of environmental history like Turner's thesis tell, or the real-life apocalyptic structures of the settler state found in Pokagon's "Red Man's Rebuke." Pokagon, Ridge, and Apess all wield genre as a tool for destroying the plots of white possession, a tool for connecting the past to the present and projecting into the future. They testify to genre as a form of time travel and a form of survivance. This archive suggests a syllabus for the dark ahead written by those who have experienced and inherited stories of surviving the end of the world. To survive the horrors of white possession and its universalizing atmospheres, which will choke everyone eventually, we must think with this archive and demand otherwise.<sup>278</sup>

Genreology makes these demands. It both clarifies those white possessive tragedies and insists on otherwise, on genecide. It joins Apess, Ridge, and Pokagon with writers like Eastman, Mourning Dove, Oskison, Mathews, and Thomas King, in an environmental justice tradition that uses genre to kill the genocidal logics of white supremacist capitalism. Where Eastman, Mourning Dove, Oskison, and Mathews turn Turner's tropes to reveal the fiction they always were, so, too, Thomas King uses the death-drives underwriting settler apocalypse to narrate survivance through and beyond those atmospheres. These authors unsettle the assumed stability of generic expectations with the generic tools meant to uphold them. In that way, they destroy settler time and space, halt the reproduction of settler capitalism's extinction-drives, and annihilate the

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<sup>278</sup> For example, physician Jonathan M. Metzler's recent book *Dying of Whiteness* traces the ways that racial resentment in conservative white Americans are leading to higher rates of suicide, lower life expectancies, and decreasing levels of education (and with it earning potential and the access to care that provides).

clean slates necessary for white afterlives.<sup>279</sup> Their genrecidal environmental justice imaginations wield genre as a tool to destroy barbed wire, to dismantle the petty sovereign' swords, to unfence our imaginations from the plots of property, and to secure, in place of those fence posts, the unfenceable and enduring roots of survivance ecologies.

This environmental justice tradition is, vitally, imperfect. It is comprised of people with messy, often contentious, relationships with their own communities – controversy that emphasizes the political complexity and diversity of social thought, action, and coalition building necessary to building anti-racist and anti-colonial environmental justice movements today. It is crucial that we not mistake anti-colonial environmental justice literature and activism as a matter of perfection. We must reject these attachments to purity, which are underwritten by the fetishistic idea that there is an outside to the atmospheres, weathers, and worries of settler capitalism. Instead, a genrealogy of white possession reveals this genrecidal tradition of survivance ecology—where human and nonhumans survive and resist and outlast the end of the world of settler capital—is not unadulterated and not limited to particular genres, but expressive of a comedy of failure that defines our own flawed, and divergent, places in these systems.

The complicated positions of each author in this archive are, too, exigent for our contemporary moment. They testify to real people whose lived realities are immanently relevant to our own - people who experienced and survived the slow, fast, past, and ongoing apocalypses of climate change. For example, as Kyle Powys Whyte notes, Native peoples' who experienced forced removal to locations with drastically different

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<sup>279</sup> In "Black AfterLives Matter," Ruha Benjamin explores these necessities to be, "*Wiped clean*. So as to remove any trace she was at the scene of a crime. *Wiped clean*, as one might do in a lab to avoid contamination, or a clinic to avoid infection. Reproducing white lives requires ongoing sterilization. *Wiped clean*, too, as with a baptism. White people are not just born once, but over and over, resurrected through law and custom, in order that they may kill with impunity."

weather patterns encountered changed climates (“Is It Colonial Déjà vu?”). Whyte’s point clarifies the historical precedents of settler colonial capitalism experienced as climate change, which has always meant violently diverging degrees of failing breath. The environmental justice archive that this project excavates shows that narrating climate change may not be about what kind of story frames we use, but whether or not they make clear the atmospheres, structural and systemic, that we are all differently in relationship with. Because we are all, all of us, in relation. There is no outside. There is just through and beyond.

Critically, the environmental justice archive that my project compiles shows that there is, too, an unbroken and profoundly radical, antiracist, anticapitalist imagination even amidst CO<sub>2</sub>lonialism’s choking social, political and material atmospheres. These stories remind us that failures are our facts, the material conditions that we must act within. The environmental justice tradition that has been and is continuing to be dedicated to an anti-colonial, anti-capital, pro-divergent life politics is everywhere to guide us through and beyond these settler atmospheres.<sup>280</sup> This project’s archive shows only a few of what must be the uncountable examples to which we must attend.

Ultimately, my project teaches literature as a potent tool for constricting or building imaginative capacity, reinforcing or upending the fences of white possession—the mechanisms of containment, processes of trafficking in stolen goods, and strategies of evasion that plot US settler sovereignty’s environmental and racial violence. Through a genealogy of white possession, I uncover the ways that what has historically seen as

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<sup>280</sup> “Settler atmospherics” is Kristen Simmons term for the logics of settler colonialism suffusing our social relations. While Simmons does not explicitly connect her term to climate change, the term is useful for thinking of the material atmospheres in relation to social, political, and narrative systems of settler colonial capitalism.

“world-making” - through Emersonian eyes, Thoreavian solitude, or Muirian mountain peaks - ironically mask the extinction imperative of settler sovereignty suffusing our 21<sup>st</sup> century atmospheres. Moreover, genreology aids us in identifying authors using the same generic conventions to annihilate these death-drives and support life beyond the end of the settler state. My project finds a critical environmental justice tradition that narrates the sovereignties that thinkers like LeAnne Simpson and others describe,<sup>281</sup> sovereignties that I detail as unfenceable –anti-confinement, anti-individualist, anti-domestication, decolonial, and enacted *by* and responsible *to* Indigenous life.

My research thus rehistoricizes the American environmental tradition by attending to environmental justice models that exist, have existed, and will outlast that which naturalizes settler sovereignty – models, past and present, capable of guiding our projections of, and failures through, possible futures. These are stories that help us see America as narrative problem, and narrative as a site of political struggle. They represent a tradition that is justice oriented and transnational, that recognizes America has always been a transnational space. This tradition, too, offers a vision of the humanities that is public, connecting us to place and to each other amidst the known and unknown of climate change. They help us see how, as whiteness spreads over landscapes, glaciers retreat. These stories teach us that seeing whiteness is training for seeing climate change.

This tradition replaces the persistence of the Jeremiad’s prophetic structure with a benediction only available through call and response. It is a tradition that calls us to

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<sup>281</sup> For Leanne Simpson, land, “Indigenous land, is not capitalism’s land. Simpson is not talking about the land as property within European and North American legal philosophy and practice. She is not referring to land as an inheritable patrilineal estate with intergenerational wealth and castemaking properties. Simpson’s land is both ‘context and process,’ she is referring to a land that defines a mode of relationality and related set of ethics and protocols for lived social responsibilities and governance defined within discrete Indigenous epistemologies. As Vine Deloria Jr. argued in his work, the epistemological difference that Indigenous land makes in Indigenous governance and society is its designation of responsibilities, not rights” (Barker 7).



respond with a way of reading, writing, and research as ceremony.<sup>282</sup> This ceremony helps us extract activism from extractivism, insisting the urgencies of environmental crisis demand the non-metaphoric nature of decolonization and the centrality of Indigenous land claims, and the histories and presents of land dispossession, to any serious study of environmental issues.<sup>283</sup> It is a tradition that cultivates an ability to make space rather than take it and to acknowledge our places—divergently embodied and enacted—within contexts of settlement and occupation. It is a tradition that calls us to never settle.<sup>284</sup>

This tradition(s) teaches all of us concerned with creating more just and livable worlds, that where we come from matters, whose land we are on matters, and whose thinking we keep company with matters. They are matters of the imagination and of the material world. It teaches us that if we do the radical work of grasping the roots of the problems that shade us, problems that both regard us with disrespect *and* provide us shelter, we can write ourselves into the future. We can articulate which worlds we want to end, hasten those endings, and fantasize about which worlds we want to work to imagine and to create. If we keep listening to people and traditions that have been

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<sup>282</sup> Here, I invoke Sean Wilson’s *Research as Ceremony*, especially his opening remarks where he calls researchers to take up unquestioned answers. While Wilson is speaking to social scientists, this project’s archive emerges in part by investigating the unquestioned nature of a particular canon of American environmental thought.

<sup>283</sup> “Extracting activism from extractivism” was an idea suggested by an audience member in the Q&A portion of my panel on “Unsettling Apocalypses” at the 2018 Critical Ethnic Studies conference in Vancouver, B.C. They were guessing at the meaning of the term extractivism, but unintentionally offered a potent example of the excesses inside the extractive industries of settler capital itself. It was a beautiful moment consistent with the tradition that this project seeks to identify.

<sup>284</sup> I mean to amend here the “unsettling the settler” that began this project, a term that Paulette Regan uses in the book by the same name to describe a process by which settlers attempt to learn from the past and make space for Indigenous counter-historical narratives and which Taiaiake Alfred, in his foreword to the book, states that this unsettling the settler means “white people staking claim to justice” (xi). I wish to suggest that there is in the futures created by unsettling the settler, the possibility of a world where “to settle” no longer motivates relations or scholarship.

fighting these systems since their beginnings, we can confront the pasts that made the present possible, and project beyond them. I consider this work my responsibility. But it is also my privilege. In differing ways, it all of *our* privilege and our *power*. The truth about stories, as Thomas King tells it, is that's all we are. And it's all we are to imagine and cultivate futures unbound by the pale sovereignties of settler capitalism. By recognizing climate change as a narrative issue, we can imagine the end of the white world and build beyond its extinction-inducing atmospheres. We can craft story and community in the spaces of radical, transformative justice narratives, experiences, and futures.

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