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EXPECT TO SEE INDIANS: NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN MODERN AMERICA

Nicolas G. Rosenthal

Kiara M. Vigil, *Indigenous Intellectuals: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the American Imagination, 1880–1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xiv + 363 pp. Figures, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$33.99.

Douglas K. Miller, *Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. xiii + 257 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95.

Kent Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz, and the Red Power Movement*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. xiii + 392 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$40.00.

United States culture and society have a long-running Indian problem, often presenting American Indians as a people of a distant past despite more than five hundred years of interactions between colonizers and Indigenous peoples that continue into the present. What can explain how Native peoples are at once denigrated and romanticized, their cultures appropriated and caricatured with so little regard or recognition as modern, contemporary peoples or for the imagining of Indigenous futures? Some answers to these questions can be found in *Americans*, an ongoing exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C. *Americans* vividly illustrates how Native American names, stories, and images have pervaded popular historical narratives and the experiences of everyday life in the United States, but almost always in ways that serve the social, cultural, and economic purposes of non-Indians.

Scholarship in American Indian history shoulders considerable responsibility for both the development and potential revision of these popular narratives. NMAI Director Kevin Gover (Pawnee) has argued that a commitment to an honest discussion about the past is an essential precursor for recognizing American Indians as contemporary actors who “prick the conscience,” present modern issues, and make political demands.¹ But only in recent decades has

there been a concerted effort by historians to understand the experiences of American Indians in the twentieth century. Much of this work follows from Philip J. Deloria's seminal *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004). It was not the first book to show Native people doing things like acting in Hollywood films, playing college football, and driving Model-T Fords, but it did provide an intellectual jolt and the language for exploring American Indian participation in the trends of modern American life as regular, dynamic, and meaningful, contrary to popular stereotypes. A growing sub-field in American Indian history is now working to historicize the claims made by anthropologist James Clifford in *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013): Indigenous peoples have emerged from generations of survival, struggle, and renewal, still negotiating settler-colonialism, but adapted to modernity, and increasingly visible as they move through local, regional, and global networks.

The three volumes under review here, each in an important series from an academic press, carry this trend forward in crucial ways by delving into early-twentieth-century performance and advocacy, mobility and urbanization, and late-twentieth-century political movements and activism. Building on the work of scholars who were among the first to address such topics, these authors often take new paths and make crucial interventions. Along with other recently published books and articles, they are helping to expand the understanding of American Indians as modern peoples who negotiated, participated in, and shaped the major trends of twentieth-century United States history, but always in ways that were rooted in their histories and identities as individuals and members of tribal and intertribal communities.

Kiara M. Vigil's *Indigenous Intellectuals: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the American Imagination, 1880–1930* joins a relatively short list of titles published by Cambridge University Press in its long-running Studies in North American Indian History series, some of which have fundamentally reshaped the field of Native American history. Notably, *Indigenous Intellectuals* is unique in relying on literary sources contextualized within a broader framework of cultural history, which reflects Vigil's positioning as an American Studies scholar emphasizing literary analysis combined with historical context and narrative. Focusing on a generation of American Indian activists that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Indigenous Intellectuals* addresses the question posed by the Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor: "What did it mean to be the first generation to hear stories of the past, bear horrors of the moment, and write to the future?" (p. 2). Specifically, Vigil provides a cultural biography of four American Indian intellectuals, highlighting the ways that they pushed back against dominant social expectations to reflect their own needs and values, and those of their communities and American Indians as a whole. While this was done through a variety of means—including drama, music, dance, art, and film—Vigil highlights writing and public speaking as

types of performance. These efforts challenged the emphasis in US politics and culture on American Indian assimilation, often playing upon the public's nostalgia for an invented Native American past but manipulating it to argue for Native peoples' place as American Indians in modern society. Such performances, Vigil contends, redefined American Indian identity, created pan-Indian intellectual networks, influenced federal policy, and set the stage for the next generation of American Indian activists.

These questions of how American Indians at the turn of the twentieth century negotiated a place for themselves and their peoples are crucial ones that build on the work of historians like Frederick Hoxie, who as early as 1992 in the *Journal of American History* described the beginning of the twentieth century as a time when a new generation of Native peoples were grappling with the meanings of "being Indian" in modern society and attempting to "define ways in which their communities and their traditions might be valued in a new setting."² *Indigenous Intellectuals* advances this scholarship by illuminating the lives of understudied figures such as Dakota writer and activist Charles Eastman. Vigil contextualizes Eastman's life within the major patterns of Gilded Age America, comparing him to other prominent activists like W.E.B. Du Bois. Arguing that Eastman sought "to teach Americans about the history of his people, the Sioux, and through his teaching to argue in favor of citizenship for Indian people in the United States" (p. 35), Vigil goes on to tease this out through an examination of Eastman's popular books, letters to reform organizations, and public appearances. With some variation, this pattern of combining historical context with textual analysis is repeated for the subjects of the remaining chapters: Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai), Gertrude Bonnin (Dakota), and Luther Standing Bear (Lakota).

Indigenous Intellectuals is largely successful in showing how these Native individuals accessed and participated in broader intellectual and activist networks even as the book sometimes fails to flesh out and enliven a historical narrative. Specifically, the emphasis on literary sources and analysis may bog down the reader accustomed to historical argumentation and a broader range of empirical evidence, an issue that is compounded by extraordinarily long chapters. American Indian experience emerges most vividly in the chapter on Standing Bear, whose life and career ranged from spaces circumscribed by federal power like the Spotted Tail Agency in South Dakota and Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania to performance circuits in New York, London, and Los Angeles. The analysis that drives Standing Bear's story, however, focusing on the tension between the limits and possibilities of performance for Native peoples, repeats that of earlier work, even as it adds new dimensions to the understanding of this fundamental dynamic. Some of these critiques might be unfair to apply to boldly interdisciplinary scholarship that is adept at using historical context to frame the work of Progressive-era, American Indian

public intellectuals. In other words, while privileging textual analysis in ways that will appeal to American Studies and literature scholars, *Indian Intellectuals* makes a valuable contribution to modern American Indian and United States history.

The participation of Native peoples in the broadest streams of twentieth-century life is also at the foundation of Douglas K. Miller's *Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century*. An entry in the University of North Carolina's Critical Indigeneities series, *Indians on the Move* argues that cities and wider patterns of mobility are central to the story of Native American survivance. While taking seriously the structures of power that pushed Native peoples towards cities and limited their chances for self-actualization, Miller foregrounds what he calls "a richer history," narrating the paths to and through urban areas while emphasizing the regenerative and transformative possibilities of Native American mobility and urbanization. Indeed, Miller contends that beginning with the basic act of seeking better conditions in the heart of American society, American Indian migrants worked to bend federal policy and take advantage of urban life for their own purposes. Mobility, construed capaciously, allowed Native peoples to engage with and challenge the settler state in ways that reverberated throughout Indian Country, contributing to a larger process of decolonization.

Indians on the Move's focus on economic adaptation and urbanization rides a current of scholarship that has been gaining strength over the past two decades and now must be understood as central to the social history of American Indians in the twentieth century. Two parallel and sometimes intersecting streams—one examining wage labor on and off American Indian reservations, the other treating migration to individual cities and the formation of urban American Indian communities—have merged to argue for Native people incorporating the defining social and economic changes of modern America into their lives and communities. *Indians on the Move* is informed by and enriches this scholarship, most notably by eschewing a place-based study in favor of a "panoramic view of Indian urban migrations in the twentieth-century" (p. 10) concerned with solidifying the idea of spatial mobility as a feature of modern Native American life. In doing so, it joins Kevin Whalen's *Native Students at Work: American Indian Labor and Sherman Institute's Outing Program, 1900–1945* (2016), a volume in the University of Washington Press's Indigenous Confluences series. *Native Students at Work* emphasizes the ways that mobility realized through boarding school outing programs became an essential tool by which Native students preserved and rebuilt their communities and cultures.

Miller begins constructing the case for centering mobility at a similar place by framing the movements of the first American Indian boarding school generations as a historical practice adapted to the pressures of federal assimilation policy in the early twentieth century. By the 1930s, Native peoples had "gradu-

ally normalized urban working and living as viable Indian futures" (p. 19), then intensified their migration to cities for the military and defense industries during World War Two. When federal policymakers developed the Bureau of Indian Affairs Voluntary Relocation and urban Adult Vocational Training programs in the 1950s, it was partially in response to Native peoples defining the terms of their mobility and in ways that codified established patterns. Even so, through the program "policy makers sought to remove Native Americans from their familiar cultural contexts and ultimately preclude their futures as Indian people," while Native Americans "entered the city...determined not only to survive as Indian people but also to expand the possibilities for Indian culture in new contexts" (p. 69).

These tensions, a profound sense of both agency and contingency, and a spectrum of outcomes from triumph to tragedy, run through the many detailed and vivid stories Miller reconstructs from an impressive array of primary sources. They reveal, in striking and often poignant ways, individual Native people's experiences as they negotiated a range of personal issues, workplace hierarchies, shifting industrial economies, racism and discrimination, and various other aspects of urban life. Miller's most substantial contribution goes back to the convincing case made for the broader sense of mobility as a defining feature of modern American Indian life that emerges from this richly textured narrative.

At times, however, *Indians on the Move* traverses analytical and descriptive ground that has been covered before, while at others Miller alludes to providing a corrective but avoids a direct critique of past scholarship; greater attention to the scholarly landscape on which *Indians on the Move* rests and more direct references to specific landmarks would have clarified Miller's interventions. Nonetheless, the book's strengths are again brought into focus by the last chapter, which argues that mobility does not stop upon arrival in the city, but remains a feature of American Indian life as "urban spaces and experiences became valuable resources" (p. 160) for tribal members working to achieve sovereignty and self-determination, whether they return to reservation and rural communities, or remain in cities looking outward. Such an ending reinforces Miller's emphasis on how crucial it is to recognize the social and cultural fluidity between the urban and rural spaces that make up Indian Country.

The importance of this mobility and the breaking down of the conceptual boundaries that have constrained a fuller understanding of Native American survivance and the processes of decolonization runs through Kent Blansett's *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz, and the Red Power Movement*. Primarily an in-depth biography of the Akwesasne Mohawk citizen and prominent activist Richard Oakes, *A Journey to Freedom* also demonstrates how Oakes crafted a new form of American Indian leadership that combined

tribal and intertribal nationalism, deepened Native people's impact on cities, and transformed the politics of Indian Country. American Indian politics and activism in the second half of the twentieth century has constituted another emerging trend in the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies, as scholars have revisited and expanded upon a handful of foundational works produced in the 1990s. These new studies strengthen the understanding of the post-World War Two growth and development through the 1960s of American Indian activism, then track its emergence onto the national scene with the 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz Island and subsequent high-profile protests by groups like the American Indian Movement. Furthermore, this scholarship charts what became known as the Red Power movement as it spread through local grassroots activist networks in cities and on reservations, national American Indian organizations, federal Indian policy, and the global vision of Native peoples.

While Oakes has been understood as a central player in these developments, *A Journey to Freedom* is the first book to attempt such a critical analysis of his contributions to the Red Power movement. Blansett argues that the Red Power movement emerged as a particular expression of Native Nationalism, or the history of tribal efforts to secure sovereignty in the face of European and American colonialism. While the movement borrowed from the non-violent direct-action methods popularized by the African American freedom struggle, Red Power's unique focus on tribal nationhood showed in its range of demands and issues, including land reclamation, treaty rights, the reform of both federal policy and tribal governments, and political, social, cultural, and economic sovereignty. Oakes became a spokesperson, leader, and symbol for Red Power because of his ability to form intertribal coalitions, conceive of and organize nonviolent protests, and define and publicize key issues.

Much of this depended upon Oakes's ability to maneuver and build networks between rural, reservation, and urban spaces, a dynamic that again reinforces the expansive sense of Indian Country that runs through an emerging understanding of modern Native American history. These arguments for Oakes's critical role and influence help flesh out our sense of the Red Power movement, although there are points in the book where they are not matched with clear evidence in support, or, conversely, when the details of Oakes's life overwhelm the analysis. *A Journey to Freedom* would also benefit from a more careful reading of past scholarship to temper its claims of originality, such as its conceptualization of "Indian Cities" (urban areas that are shaped by intertribal American Indian communities), which does not engage the now considerable work in urban American Indian history. Such critiques, however, may reflect the Herculean challenges of writing a critical biography that seeks both to document and contextualize a single prominent individual's life during a tumultuous era.

Indeed, the in-depth portrait of Oakes that emerges from *A Journey to Freedom* makes for engaging reading that can appeal to a broad audience while often elucidating the many roles he played. Blansett describes Oakes's early years as crucial to his worldview because the nascent activist moved between two politically active communities: Akwesasne, with a history of opposition to both U.S. and Canadian colonialism, and a neighborhood of Mohawk ironworkers in Brooklyn, full of apartments, bars, churches, community organizations, and stores. Akwesasne resistance to massive energy projects like the St. Lawrence Seaway Project and the Tuscarora Project further shaped Oakes's political consciousness. Then he arrived at San Francisco State University in 1968, just as student protests erupted over the need to establish ethnic studies programs. Within this crucible, Oakes developed his vision of intertribal Native Nationalism and brought it to fruition with the group Indians of All Tribes and its occupation of Alcatraz Island. The positive media coverage, support from around the world, attention from public officials, and inspiration it lent other Native peoples and organizations sparked dozens of additional protests. Oakes participated in some of these but was killed at age 30 in 1972 in an incident that Blansett describes as an assassination. Oakes's short career belies his substantial legacy as an activist, which includes contributing to the development of Native American Studies programs, shifting the course of American Indian activism, and influencing federal policy reforms towards self-determination.

This study thus solidly roots Oakes in a history of American Indian activism in the modern period that goes back to the Progressive-era intellectuals treated by Vigil, while looking ahead to contemporary events like the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests. It is especially appropriate then that *A Journey to Freedom* is the latest entry in Yale University Press's Henry Roe Cloud Series on American Indians and Modernity, named for a prominent Progressive-era American Indian intellectual and activist. The fact that all three of the volumes under review are parts of important series by prestigious academic presses bodes well for the continuation of this movement to address topics elucidating the role of American Indians in modern society, and both the University of Nebraska Press and the University of Oklahoma Press have also recently published works on twentieth-century American Indian history in their *New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* & *New Directions in Native American Studies* series, respectively.

Other recently published books and articles also suggest that this is a broader, continuing trend. Historians of Native America have begun to bridge history and art history, as seen in Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote, *Crafting an Indigenous Nation: Kiowa Expressive Culture in the Progressive Era* (2019) and Philip J. Deloria, *Becoming Mary Sully: Toward an American Indian Abstract* (2019), both of which integrate visual sources into a telling of the lives of American Indian artists

negotiating twentieth-century United States culture and society. Similarly, a recent special issue of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, guest edited by Nicolas G. Rosenthal and Liza Black, focuses on “Native Representations,” or how Indigenous peoples throughout the twentieth century have narrated their own histories and cultures through art, cartography, film, literature, and publishing.³ Books like Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014) and Alexandra Harmon’s *Reclaiming the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed* (2019) show how American Indian nations and their claims for tribal sovereignty disrupt and trouble state borders, state and federal power, and the prerogatives of global capitalism. The prominent role that Indigenous peoples have played in recent critiques of the Anthropocene age have underscored works that connect twentieth-century Native American and environmental history, such as Dina Gilio-Whitaker’s *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock* (2019), Devon A. Mihesuah and Elizabeth Hoover’s *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States: Restoring Cultural Knowledge, Protecting Environments, and Regaining Health* (2019), and another recent special edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* guest edited by Natale Zappia on “Indigenous Food Sovereignty.”⁴

We can continue to build on this scholarship as we persist in telling new stories that seek to better understand and make a case for American Indians as modern peoples who negotiated, participated in, and shaped the major trends of twentieth-century United States history. With its collective weight, this work can help us reach a point where not just Americans but people around the globe will expect to see Indigenous peoples as dynamic actors in the creation and ongoing development of the modern world.

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1. Kevin Gover, “(Re)Making History: The Real Story Is Bigger and Better,” TEDxJacksonville (2015), <http://tedxjacksonville.com/talks/>, accessed 10 December 2019.

2. Frederick E. Hoxie, “Exploring a Cultural Borderland: Native American Journeys of Discovery in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 969.

3. Nicolas G. Rosenthal and Liza Black, eds., “(Special Issue) Representing Native Peoples: Native Narratives of Indigenous History and Culture,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42:3 (2018).

4. Natale Zappia, ed., “(Special Issue) Indigenous Food Sovereignty: Native Health, Food Systems and Economic Revitalization,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 41:3 (2017).