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# *Stalking the Lesson, Ministering the Family: Critical Interventions of African American–American Indian Family History\**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1900, Eva Shawnee, a Creek girl, enrolled in Hampton Normal and Agriculture Institute. Hampton aimed to uplift the black race through academics, industrial trades, and manual training. It opened its doors to Native Americans between 1878 and 1923; however, when Eva's youngest siblings enrolled at Hampton, they registered as *Negro*. Traditional perspectives in American history, because of institutionalized racial hierarchies inside and outside the academy, provide challenges to the types of interdisciplinary scholarship that may address families like the Shawnees. Utilizing but transcending the academic sphere, this article encourages dialogue between marginalized groups and argues that they have more to gain by uniting than by maintaining colonial divisions between them. This paper will explore recent academic work on African American–American Indian families and consider how indigenous critical theoretical perspectives may challenge traditional views of American history.

This topic is as timely as it is timeless. This history is pregnant with possibilities and burdened with pain. As imperialism haunts our hearts and our minds, its specter promises to plague our children if we do not extract lessons and actively work to break complementary cycles of oppressions.

**KEY WORDS** African American; Native American; Family; Indigenous Critical Theory; Comparative History

In 1900, Eva Shawnee, a Creek girl, enrolled at Hampton Normal and Agriculture Institute in Virginia. Hampton, founded during Reconstruction with the explicit aim to uplift the black race through academics, industrial trades, and manual training, opened its doors to Native Americans between 1878 and 1923. This marked the school's effort to mold young African Americans and Native Americans simultaneously into model Anglo-American Christians. Eva was the first of William and Julia Shawnee's eight children to attend the school, federally funded and segregated between facilities for blacks and Indians. For its

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part, Hampton officials claimed that racial tensions prohibited black and Indian students from socializing. They also cited irreconcilable dietary differences, so Eva and four of her siblings attended the school but rarely made contact with the majority black population living on the very same campus. When William and Julia's youngest three children enrolled in the institute, however, registration was just a bit different. When the youngest Shawnee children enrolled, their registration forms clearly stated that they were Negro, not Indian. Indeed, by the time Eva graduated, she wrote a letter to her scholarship donor letting her donor know that she was in fact not Indian but black (King 1988).

This story raises many questions. Perhaps most obvious: "Well, what were they?" Explaining some of the ambiguity and confusion is that William, the father, was an enslaved African American who had been freed and adopted by the Shawnee and who married a Creek woman. The children were "half black" and "half Indian." This answer falls short to explain, however, why the government and the family identified some of their children as Indian and others as Negro. Why did Eva later decide to identify herself as black? How common was this story, and did the reverse ever happen? To be sure, families of diverse backgrounds were abundant in America. The answers to these questions, however, evade traditional perspectives in American history because of, among other reasons, white hegemony, institutionalized racial hierarchies, and contentious relationships among oppressed peoples inside and outside of the academy.

Scholars have not often explored the interrelated and comparative histories of African American and American Indian peoples until relatively recently. Like the dorms and cafeterias of the Hampton Institute, these histories and the historians who write them have stayed primarily in their respective fields, with little interest in breaking down walls and building bridges between them. Scholars often write the history of Native Americans, African Americans, Chicano Americans, and others in isolation from each other and from society as a whole, despite their inextricably shared experiences, although some scholars have written histories that reveal the very complicated and mixed nature of American history. For example, historians are finding connections between the early Indian slave trade and the start-up capital for the African slave trade (see Ekberg 2007; Gallay 2003). Others consider how the removal of Indians from the Southeast affected African Americans (see Miles 2005). These studies are beginning to break down the dominant paradigm of racially and ethnically segregated histories.

Attacking the dominant paradigm, this study argues that American history should be studied on the terms of how the diverse people who inhabit the continent interact among themselves *and with each other*. Histories that separate or neglect certain groups that concomitantly lived in a geographic region tell only part of the story. In other words, all of these stories put together are worth more than each story told separately. One group of academics has even called for a subfield in disciplines called *interracial studies* (Leiker, Warren, and Watkins 2007). Going beyond the academic sphere, this study hopes to encourage a dialogue between marginalized groups who may gain more by uniting than by maintaining colonial divisions between them. This paper will explore some of the most recent academic work on African American–American Indian families. I will next consider how indigenous critical theoretical perspectives may intervene in current African American historiography.

The study focuses on a large period traditionally separated into antebellum, Civil War and Reconstruction, Progressive Era, and the interwar periods. It offers a new concept of time, centering critical changes based on localities and interactions between Native Americans and African Americans rather than on the traditional periods that have been based on settler logics. Furthermore, it acknowledges that localities have their own physical, temporal, and social logics. A view of changes over this nontraditional period may reveal a different, more poignant, story. I aim to let the story evolve organically rather than create rigid delineations that perpetuate racial hierarchies and essentialist ideas about people who still have not had proper attention in textbooks or classrooms.

This study also aims to complicate the history of race, a concept created to aid colonialism and still used to divide people on many levels. To understand how the concept of race evolved and differed throughout American history is to acknowledge that it is a social construction and to finally understand it as a historical misfortune that needs to be reconciled with current sociopolitical relations rather than maintained as an aid to racial oppression. By not assigning present racial norms onto earlier periods, this study aims to look outside the box, so to speak. It will ask fresh questions of familiar sources and will consider how people make decisions and understand themselves and others, and how sociopolitical developments changed the answers to these questions.

This topic is as timely as it is timeless. The history of African American and American Indian interaction is as pregnant with possibilities as it is stunted by mutual fear, anger, and bitterness. It is, like most stories involving colonialism, a painful story, but it needs to be told. As imperialism haunts our hearts and minds, its specter promises to plague future generations if we do not extract lessons and actively work to break complementary cycles of oppressions.

### **HISTORIOGRAPHY: RECOGNIZING AND RECLAIMING THE AFRO-INDIAN FAMILY, 1830–1930**

Just about every generation has had at least some literature—be it academic or amateur, and though sparse until the previous generation—about the Afro-Indian family. James N. Leiker’s comprehensive historiography of leading scholarship on black-Indian intersections in the United States began at the birth of the black history movement (Leiker et al. 2007). In 1920, Carter G. Woodson called for a more in-depth look at the interrelated histories, saying, “One of the longest unwritten chapters of the history of the United States is that treating of the relations of the Negroes and Indians.” Caroline Bond Day, an African American anthropologist and a contemporary of Carter G. Woodson and the African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, published *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States* in 1932. A person of mixed ethnic ancestry who could have “passed” as white, Bond Day embraced her African American heritage as she wrote about others who shared her multiethnic American roots, spanning the period from 1890 to the 1930s. The title of Bond Day’s work does not hint at another crucial aspect of her study. In cataloging hundreds of mixed ethnic families, Bond Day also cataloged people from families of mixed Indian heritage. The Harvard Peabody Archives contain 35 boxes of her research, including correspondences, anthropometry forms, questionnaires, guides for

taking measurements, family histories, genealogical charts with photographs and hair samples, and early manuscripts for her publication. The papers also include materials she collected to aid in her research, such as news clippings, pamphlets, books, and manuscripts by other researchers. She identified racial categories of Negro, Indian, and White, and gathered sociological and genealogical data from at least 346 families and 1,385 individuals born after 1860 who lived in the East and in the South. Bond Day included information on family life, housing, occupations and salaries, religious affiliations, education, special interests, and political activities. She compiled genealogical charts from pictures of individuals and families. Other contemporaries of Bond Day, such as Melville J. Herskovits (1941) and J. H. Johnston (1929), also explored black-Indian relationships.

During the 1960s, literature sprang from temporary efforts to create racial solidarity among blacks and Indians. This movement did not consider connections between Indians and blacks and other minorities, and it did not consider the highly nuanced and porous nature of the interrelated history of mixed peoples. Leiker's seven categories of black-Indian interrelated history include the colonial and slavery experiences, the early development of Indian territory, westward expansion, black-Indian interracial education, the Progressive Era, the social science movement and the anthropological attack on race, and post-WWII racial nationalism (Leiker et al. 2007). Evidence and literature on the family have made passing appearances in each of these categories and, more prominently, has played an important part in recent scholarship.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Daniel Littlefield and Jack Forbes considered African American–American Indian connections. Forbes's *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (1988), explored European notions of color and the evolution of race. Littlefield wrote on African American involvement with the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations. He also explored African involvement in the Trail of Tears and black freedmen after the Civil War. He portrayed the African-Seminole relationship as the most benign of its kind. Other works show a contentious history that involved slavery, Indian-white cooperation, and the denial of freedmen's rights. Throughout these works, Littlefield's narrative of the interrelated histories of African Americans and Native Americans focused on themes of cooperation, mutual oppression, and victimization (Littlefield 1977, 1978, 1979).

Since 1990, much more has been written about African American–American Indian family and community life. As varied as they may have been, all of these relationships developed in the shadow of US expansion into the West. The Anglo-American drive to dominate and to divide resources, land, and people would profoundly affect each person and community, though perhaps in unexpected ways. Despite the African and Native Americans' experience of a shared enemy and oppressor, the struggle to survive divided them and placed African American–Native American families in precarious circumstances. Indeed, "the colonial incentive to keep the two peoples apart found continuity in separate historiographical traditions well into the twentieth century" (Brooks 2002:5). While debates over racial identity, nation-building, and control of resources raged, black and Native families imagined, defined, and redefined themselves in response to both internal and external pressures on their very survival. Works since

1990 bring together black and Native historiography more than ever before. Historians are documenting facts about not only where and when blacks and natives came together but also what these encounters meant in the context of American imperialism, racial identity, and the intimate spaces of the American family.

In 2000, the Many Nations, One Family conference in St. Paul opened discussion on this mostly neglected part of American history. In 2002, Dartmouth College held a national conference, *Eating out of the Same Pot: Relating Black and Native (Hi)stories*. This conference was followed in 2006 by the Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland publication, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds*. Finally, several edited volumes such as *Confounding the Color Line* (Brooks 2002), *Race, Roots, and Relations: Native and African Americans* (Straus and Dequintal 2005), *The First and the Forced: Essays on the Native American and African American Experience* (Leiker et al. 2007), and *Of Two Spirits: American Indian and African American Oral Histories* (Tosee and Williams 2007) explored the topic of Afro-Indian history to some extent through the scope of the family.

One of the pressing questions of the 1990s and 2000s has been that of identity. In *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (2005), Tiya Miles wrote about Doll Shoeboots. Doll was a black slave who married her Cherokee master. They had several children and grandchildren, whom they reared in a Cherokee community. Miles eloquently weaves the story of this woman's family into the larger narratives of Indian history, slavery, and colonial expansion. The book is organized geographically and chronologically into two sections: before removal, in Mississippi, and after removal to Oklahoma Indian Territory, and it explores the meanings and implications of intermarriage between Indians and non-Indians, as well as the development of African slavery among the Cherokees. In the book, Miles discusses how new ideas of property, Christianity, the gold rush, and nationhood were negotiated on Cherokee land between elites and smaller farmers.

Later chapters of the book show how political, economic, and social changes interfered with and created different relationships among black, white, and native Cherokees. The book explores the material and spiritual ill effects of Indian removal on the Indian and black members of their families, as well as the continued threats to black Indians coming from both outside and within Indian Territory. Members of the Shoeboots family were abused, captured, and sold into slavery, but as a testament to family ties, the Indian community and the Shoeboots's Indian family aided Doll and her black-Indian children in regaining their freedom and coming back to their land in the Territory.

Miles's project fleshes out the stories of people like Doll Shoeboots to ask larger, often difficult, questions. In a recent interview, she posed several critical questions. First, what has race meant in the history of what we now call the United States? Second, how has it shaped and misshaped identities, relationships, and communities? Third, what is the price we have all paid for an ideology that was designed to exploit the many on behalf of the few? And finally, can we imagine another and better way that confronts our racial past but does not continue to imprison us in historically constructed and destructive modes of relating in the present? These questions at once problematize traditional settler narratives and speak to the complex relationships between and among African Americans and Native Americans.

Miles's experience at a conference before the book's publication revealed how the topic remained contentious. She recalled that an Indian woman in the audience expressed fear that documenting the "intermarriage of black and Indian people would give the U. S. government just one more reason to declare Native people inauthentic and soluble and then to seize their remaining lands and any vestiges of political autonomy." (Miles 2005) Whether this woman's opinion was in the majority or minority is uncertain; however, Miles was not the only author to meet resistance in writing of the tenuous bonds between blacks and Native Americans.

Like Miles, Claudio Saunt was discouraged while writing his book about an African–Native American family. His 2005 monograph, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family*, is an intergenerational biography of one family started by a Scottish immigrant and a Creek woman, from the 1780s to the 1920s. He received resistance from the native community and considerably violent resistance from the family he researched. The racism against blacks that he portrayed and the acrimony within the community he revealed are sometimes startling. It was also a comment on colonialism, racism, American identity, and familial relations.

Saunt preceded each chapter with a note on current issues often centered around his hardships in researching for the book. He also included an insightful essay on sources and historiography. To compile the history of one family spanning from the 1780s to the 1920s, he relied primarily on federal documents. Additionally, he utilized George Washington Grayson's autobiography, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G. W. Grayson*. There were various sections missing from the original autobiography, mostly those concerning Grayson's African American heritage. Saunt's aim was to fill in the pieces edited out of the biography, using Creek census, probate records, Civil War claims, Bureau of Indian Affairs individual Indian files, and Dawes Commission records. Saunt placed himself amid several overlapping lineages of historiography that included discourses on American racial formations, Indians and slavery, the Five Tribes, and removal and post-removal Indian societies.

In *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations*, Katja May aimed to "retrieve the experiences and voices of African Americans and Native Americans who lived in the autonomous Muskogee and Cherokee Nations from the 1830s to the 1920s" (1996:7). May paid special attention to the 1880s and 1890s, when those Indian nations incorporated African Americans to escape white racism after the Civil War. She relied heavily on the statistical analysis of random population samples from the 1900 and 1920 Cherokee and Creek Nation censuses. She based her work on race theory of Eric Wolf, who wrote that "racial designations were the outcome of the subjugation of populations in the course of European mercantile expansion. Racial terms have since mirrored the political process by which population were tuned into providers of coerced surplus labor. These racial terms are exclusionary and delegate people to the lower ranks of society" (May 1996:8).

James F. Brooks's introduction to the 2002 collection of essays in *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian Black Experience in America* relates his meeting of Euterpe Cloud Taylor, a Ute woman whose father was a black man and whose mother was Ute. Taylor's father, John Taylor, was born into slavery, fought in the Civil War, married an

Indian woman, was accepted into the community, and was known as a good farmer. Taylor related her African, or black, background as a *heritage* and spoke of her native background as her Ute *culture*. The distinction between a heritage, or birthright, and a culture, something learned and malleable, was Taylor's way of understanding her mixed background. Brooks noted that Taylor never synthesized or mixed the two, rather spoke of two distinct streams that created her family. In contrast, Taylor did not mention her Hispanic or white background. Brooks saw this as a significant omission, as whites outnumbered blacks in the family. Brooks hinted at acrimony among people of varied background, using Taylor's selective multiculturalism to reveal the collection's major theme: how, in varied ways, people understand and negotiate their mixed backgrounds. The historians, ethnographers, and other specialists who wrote essays for the collection aimed to begin the movement toward:

Recovering the complexity beyond the discovery and analyses of 'biracial' or 'tri-ethnic' communities, to engage carefully with the cross-cutting tensions and ambiguities of dynamic cultural hybridity and to do so as much as possible from the standpoint of these mixed- and multiple-descended peoples themselves—to confound the color line (or color lines) in ways as yet beyond imagination. (Brooks 2002:6)

The book is organized around overlapping chronological themes that include “forging relations,” “the legacy of slavery,” and “complicating identities.” Among the authors who addressed issues immediate to the family and community are Dedra S. McDonald, who argued that the “Spanish system of racial stratification and coerced labor placed Africans and Indians in a context of deep cultural contact.” McDonald showed how these contacts “ranged from sexual liaisons and intermarriage to the formation of small marginal communities of mulattos and *zambohijos*, from criminal alliances to occasional anti-Spanish collaboration, especially before 1750” (Brooks 2002:8). Other essays explored the creation of mixed communities, shared spiritual and cultural traditions, and African and Indian responses to westward expansion and racism.

The newest literature considers on some level that “race is neither finite nor singularly defined for many Americans. Instead, race is a fluid category that can be defined or redefined by skin color, family heritage, DNA testing, political rights, court decisions, or any number of other factors” (Leiker et al. 2007). Second, the literature grapples with the idea of what to call people in these communities: Afro-Indian, African American–Native American, Black-Indian, biracial, and others terms have been concepts that people have used. Deciding how to describe these groups is a critical point, as it has not only historical but also current political repercussions.

A third idea from these works is that the story of black and native history is still immediate and painful for many. In these cases, the pain may be due to racist notions about black people or due to the fear of the federal government's further oppression and interference in the lives of Indian people. These pieces also show that racism is alive and



well and continues to haunt families, communities, and federal legislation. Likewise, colonialism continues to permeate American life. Saunt cites ways in which the federal government still relies on racist policies to dictate the lives of Americans; on a most basic level, it allows past racism to be an integral part of current policy. The one-drop rule, for instance, excluded whole communities of black and mixed Creeks from registering on Dawes roles or joining tribal political society. The effects resulted in generations to this day that are caught in legal, social, economic, and spiritual limbo.

A final theme is commitment to community and current activism. The *Shifting Borders of Race* project and the Dartmouth conference revealed the interdisciplinary and contemporary multicultural potentials. These articles and monographs have just begun to ask questions such as “Where are the borders between people on removal trails, in maroon settlements, on a family tree, or in a DNA laboratory? What happens to the definitions of race when a judge, a test, an oral history, or a newly found piece of paper reveals that people are linked together in biological ways that were previously thought unimaginable? ... Can a common consciousness exist between two groups of people from different, but sometimes merging, racial backgrounds?” (Warren 2007).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIGENOUS CRITICAL THEORY**

I argue that the intervention of an indigenous critical theoretical perspective would begin to answer these questions and to pose others that open academically collaborative opportunities while challenging existing settler logics. Indigenous critical theory poses meaningful academic and personal challenges for historians and other academics interested in social change. First and foremost, it requires that the academic embrace her or his multiple responsibilities by acknowledging her multiple personalities as an intellectual, a social member of a community, and as an activist. Taiiike Alfred (2005) and Dale Turner (2006) explained how these multiple personalities may be utilized in the wider struggle for self-determination and sovereignty. Second, indigenous critical theory may intervene on current understandings of multiculturalism by understanding people on their own terms and rejecting settler logics. It opens transnationalism by centering the local experience as a way to understand national and global relationships. A third point of intervention is the characteristic of constant evolution and movement. This movement is collaborative, ever incorporating new disciplines and viewpoints. Finally, indigenous critical theory calls on the academic to confront oppressive hegemonies. It is explicitly anti-colonial, but I also understand it as anti-oppression in whatever form that oppression may take. Ultimately, indigenous critical theory is a way to fight for self-determination and indigenous sovereignty.

Indigenous critical thought may be a tool to help us understand the construction of sovereignty. It may be a great tool to shorten the gap between life as lived by individuals and the ways that academics write about that life. This is an exciting proposition because it is the structures of indigenous societies—the ontological and the epistemological—that provide the critical perspectives from which we may understand societies, individuals, and ourselves. Indigenous critical thought urges us to go beyond recognizing; it enables us to propagate these structures, to build new ones and to use materials—old or new—to

our advantage against the oppressive hegemonic powers that be (Moreton-Robinson 2007). In a way, indigenous critical thought demands constant revolution. It is the answer to the materialist revolution that has failed so often in communist societies. It is a refusal of both the purely materialist revolution and the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty that “operates to ensure its continued investments in itself” (Moreton-Robinson 2007.)

Indigenous critical thought pulls writers, readers, and others out of the structures that enable and encourage patriarchal or oppressive hegemony. It renders the work and ideas of academics—so often blamed for being out of touch—of the utmost importance alongside other forms of activism. Indigenous critical thinkers and intellectuals interrupt those traditional discourses of the colonial West. They de-educate and re-educate, and in many cases provide the structural support that people need to keep doing what they have been doing—all the while providing the ideological space that enables a widening indigenous-to-indigenous dialogue and indigenous-to-nonindigenous interface. In this way, academics are included in the ranks of the most practical warriors in the struggle for self-determination and sovereignty.

To divide and conquer is not just to take advantage of diverse peoples by breeding hostilities between them. It is to divide people from their history. It is also to detach people—in this case, all peoples—from their histories and from the history of the land on which they live. Tony Birch’s essay “‘The Invisible Fire’: Indigenous Sovereignty, History and Responsibility” in *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* illustrates what is at stake when history is pulled from discussions on indigenous sovereignty (Birch 2007). The history-wars debate illustrates both how conservative academics aim to maintain the status quo through their retelling of history and how others may—on varying levels—provide a counter to that discussion and understanding. “They additionally utilize the past to produce anti-Indigenous revisionism within intellectually suspect but appropriately ‘controversial’ history texts.” The aftermath of this widespread twisting and forgetting of history resulted in “official denial and collective and complicit amnesia.” Interestingly, Birch blamed the liberal-run reconciliation process for an increased dependency on historical amnesia, “as an erasure of both past and present is necessary in order to understand ourselves in an imaginary state of future achievement.” This statement supports Alfred’s idea that there should be restitution rather than reconciliation.

Finally, Birch asserted that indigenous communities must act in recognition of the sovereignty that they hold: “It is important that indigenous people speak on behalf of and with marginalized migrant communities.” Although Birch wrote of the indigenous populations of Australia working in solidarity with marginalized migrants to their continent, this statement should be extended to a global understanding of indigenous peoples. In this way, indigenous peoples located within the borders of the United States may provide a real alternative for themselves and for others to the ills of U.S. hegemony.

Alfred’s (2005) *Wasáse* is both a battle plan and a primer for the academic warrior. First, in the section entitled “Rebellion of the Truth,” Alfred laid the theoretical framework for what he calls the modern wasase: a courageous thinker with many identities, strategically making change, and challenging white control over people and land. It is an ethical and political position that aims to force settlers to acknowledge

indigenous peoples' rights to land, culture, and resources. Alfred called on the whole person to reject colonialism, reconnect to indigenous ways, and act in ways that represent the indigenous ethos. By seeing the common histories, experiences, and spiritual and philosophic groundings, Alfred encouraged unity in the struggle. Without this sense of unity, each individual group may not be able sustain itself against further oppression. He showed how the colonial mindset has stained indigenous peoples and sets out the strategies for the academic activist. Alfred reasoned that the enemy is not "the white man" but rather those Western philosophies that support oppression and cultural genocide. In other words, the enemy is the imperialist mindset.

Next, Alfred defined the Onkwehonwe heritage and reframed the indigenous struggle. This is a battle of words and of minds. The struggle for sovereignty demands regeneration rather than recovery, restitution rather than reconciliation, and resurgence rather than resolution. Finally, Alfred defined power and asserted that opponents of the state must disrupt the state's agendas by using the resources and capacities at their disposal. Our bodies and minds, and our decisions to cooperate or not to cooperate, are within the influence of each individual, family, and community. The survival of indigenous languages, for example, serves not to show their superiority but rather to act as a gauge of peoples' abilities to reassert themselves and their cultures. Indigenous languages are a confrontation and assertion of people's local logics on many levels. Just as these languages should not exist, the African American–American Indian family should not exist. Yet they strive.

Aiwa Ong's (1999) characteristics of globalization encompassed ideas of trans-realities, showing activity moving across spatial and national borders as well as showing the movement of nations being constructed and reconstructed over temporal boundaries. If there is a center to indigenous critical theory, interdisciplinary work is there along with multiculturalism, because transnationalism is such a crucial ingredient. The growing number of works in anthropology, history, education, and legal fields on different continents at different times attests to the benefits of considering the interdisciplinary indigenous framework as a destination point for Native American studies. This kind of comparative work rejects the false boundaries and isolation of people living in diverse locations with common, or very similar, enemies. It also may begin to attack the internalized colonialisms, racisms, and other forms of bigotry that are alive and healthy in indigenous communities. The indigenous framework is open to both the local and the transnational/global academics and activism. In this way, indigenous critical theory may support living cultures in their day-to-day decisions, as well as support them in anti-colonial activity.

Another characteristic of indigenous critical theory is its evolving nature. The ability to be open to evolution is a proven quality of many indigenous cultures. From the evolution of the Voodoo religion from Africa during slavery to its healthy survival across North and South America, to the survival of other indigenous ceremonies and customs, the trans- in all of these cases enabled people to change with time while making decisions based on what was important to them, their families, and their cultures and on what was happening socially, politically, and historically. The indigenous framework (in writing history, for example) recaptures how people actually

live—not as deer in headlights waiting for the settler to commit genocide or bestow civil rights but rather as people who calculate and plan, and who make decisions based on their experience, not on their victimhood.

Another important attribute of indigenous critical theory is the ability to be collaborative. While much of K–12 and higher education reflects settler logics, the indigenous framework engages collaborative history in a way that does not just disrupt the banking concept, it blows it out of the water.<sup>1</sup> While W. E. B. Du Bois (2007) spoke of the double consciousness of black folk, the scholar and activist working in indigenous critical theory realizes that her or his work is local, national, and transnational. Each of these arenas develops a slightly different consciousness, but they all work together in communities to move forward the goals of theory and activism.

The practical aims of indigenous critical theory, then, stem from an understanding of these characteristics. First, indigenous critical theory concerns recognition and consciousness/identity issues. In this sense, *identity* refers to an individual's and a community's ability to practice self-determination and sovereignty. The ability to identify with the struggle of recognition and to align oneself (one's community) to that struggle is the first step in the path to sojournerhood and warriorship. This is intimately connected to Chadwick Allen's idea of blood/land/memory (Allen 2002). First, it has to do with indigenous people determining the ground rules for the discussion of and the standards of discussions about their identity and political goals. Identity and recognition are also important in Allen's construct, in that the whole of indigenous struggles is made up of localized struggles and localizing theory. This method, practically and strategically, interrupts the trend toward the indistinguishable or disappearing indigenous communities and peoples.

Next is confronting settler society and politics. Kevin Bruyneel's (2007) *Third Space of Sovereignty* reveals a space for the re-rendering of the African American–American Indian family. Third spaces are sites of confronting settler constructions of political identity, time, and space—a rejection of the false binary that settler governments have perpetuated in claiming that Native Americans must either be inside or outside of the United States. These claims, from the earliest treaties to current politicians, have shaped the discussion of indigenous identity and agency in a way that obscure real issues and the reality of political issues. The third space of sovereignty considers history, the territory of institutions and cultural locations, and the visions that may bind people together. The third space is also a way of linguistic resistance. I see it, as a way to reshape the language we use, as a practical tool for academics, activists, and others who wish to bring about change. Bruyneel offers up the third space as an “entry point around which different approaches could converge to speak across disciplinary boundaries” and to transcend disciplinary boundaries. This is the space of disrupting and destroying settler binaries by engaging Bruyneel's third space and other such theoretical frameworks. It is to consider history (or political time), territorial/institutional/cultural locations (or political space), and the dynamics and visions that bind people together (or political identity). Language, again, is a site of activism on social, political, and legal realms. It enables scholars and nonacademics to take decolonizing to deeper levels. It is along with,

because of, and out of language that practical aims are able to take root on the ground, in communities, and within political structures.

Keith Basso (1996) contends that place-making is a universal tool of historical imagination, and involves “multiple acts of remembering and imagining.” His work relates the Apache relationship to land. When he asks, “What do people make of places?” he means to show his reader something that they’ve perhaps taken for granted. Comprehending this is crucial for the understanding of indigenous thought and action. By showing how Apache people use place-names to construct history and teach morality, Basso provides a model of documenting local, indigenous logics. The place-names help create people’s conception of history. This idea is reminiscent of Alfred’s discussion on using traditional methods to uncover indigenous logics.

Continuing the look ahead for a theoretical and activist framework in *This is Not a Peace Pipe*, Dale Turner (2006) gives a program for indigenous activism. He argues that for indigenous people to assert their rights to nationhood and sovereignty, they must engage in a proper discourse with the academy and the government. Thus far, the relationship between indigenous people and the Canadian government has been ineffective because the Canadian people are ignorant of indigenous sovereignty issues, the government considers itself superior, and indigenous people see themselves as sovereign. Turner advocates a new legal and political paradigm that takes into account the critical issues that mainstream liberal philosophies ignore. Turner engaged the White Paper philosophy, the Citizens Plus philosophy as advocated by Alan Cairn, and the Minority Rights philosophy as advocated by Will Kymlicka to show the shortcomings of previous and current generations of lawmakers and intellectuals. The biggest discrepancies are that liberal philosophies do not adequately address the legacy of colonialism; nor do liberal philosophies and policies respect that indigenous rights flow from indigenous nationhood and not the Canadian state. They do not question settler claims of sovereignty over aboriginal people and lands, and they do not recognize that a meaningful theory of aboriginal theory of First People’s rights in Canada is impossible without indigenous participation.

Turner’s solution involves a division of intellectual labor. He calls for indigenous philosophers to step up and take a role in educating their communities. Furthermore, he asserts that indigenous intellectuals should engage Western European thought to educate the wider majority on indigeneity, assertion of indigenous rights, and secure nationhood. First, there must be an embrace of indigenous thinking and world views. Because the differences between indigenous people and Western Europeans/Canadians lie in philosophy, indigenous people must know that philosophy, the oral traditions, and the indigenous language. Second, indigenous intellectuals who are educated in the Western European tradition must articulate indigenous peoples’ differences to the dominant culture by engaging the dominant culture’s ideas in its own terms. Lastly, indigenous intellectuals must reveal Western European philosophy as a colonial activity by engaging in philosophical and political activity. Indigenous intellectuals, Turner argues, are in the best position to articulate to nonindigenous peoples of Canada what it means to be indigenous. These word warriors are intimately connected to the discourses of the state and must use their positions to assert, defend, and protect the rights of sovereignty and

nationhood of indigenous communities. Indeed, a call for warriors in all disciplines as a start to serious intellectual work and effective activism is in line to combat issues of race, ethnicity, and racial hierarchies.

African Americanist scholars have contended with issues of the community and family as well, and offer some insightful contributions. Cornel West's (1992) theorization provided a linking point between African American and American Indian intellectual life and responsibilities, considering the current precarious position of black intellectuals in the United States. Since the end of the Civil Rights Movement, African American intellectuals have increasingly joined the academy. This migration has resulted in a considerable brain drain from traditional mobilizing forces in the black church and other community organizations. Dwindling community church organization and the overall shrinking of public space in American society have resulted in a lowering of literacy rates, a loss of community mobilization, and, therefore, a loss of opportunities for sociopolitical self-determination. West, like those theorizing in indigenous critical theory, considered cultural studies and transnational ties between cultural and intellectual movements a possibility for revitalization. These ties may energize the struggles against oppression of African Americans, Native Americans, and other dispossessed peoples fighting for higher degrees of self-determination.

Finally, Patricia Hill Collins (2006) has written of families "as actual sites of social reproduction as well as the ideological sites where individuals and groups are socialized into their appropriate places in the social order." She understood the family as "a crucial template for conceptualizing nation." Literature on the Afro-Indian family has in many ways focused on this contentious reality. It has highlighted how black and Indian people respond as victims to colonial/settler oppression.

## **CONCLUSION: STALKING THE LESSON, MINISTERING THE FAMILY**

In conclusion, indigenous critical theory may intervene in the existing literature of the African American–American Indian family and allow it to enter American Indian studies by pulling it out of and away from settler logics inherent in the field of history. Like Basso's project, this one argues for a commitment to utilize local constructions of reality rather than those that perpetuate Anglo-American hegemony. Alfred's ideas of community activism, Turner's ideas of word warriorship, and Ong's flexible citizenship pose unorthodox questions and give field-expanding results.

The story of Eva Shawnee and her family shows that at certain times, people did understand race as a flexible concept. They also saw it as something that they could use to their advantage. Presumably, Eva's experience at the Hampton Institute was a critical one in her self-development and identification. What role did the biracial component of her education play? Did Eva understand an advantage to being black rather than Creek? Was there a perceived stronger sense of solidarity, greater networking, or other factors among blacks than among American Indians at this time in this place? If, as Vine Deloria (1973) asserted, cultural freedom is power (and legal status), to what level did mixed families understand and consciously use that power? The answers to these questions—

indeed, the very asking of them—attack notions of racial hierarchies and white supremacy that have thus far been taken for granted in the field of history.

## ENDNOTE

1. See Freire (1968). Freire put forth the banking concept as a critique of education. The banking concept, he said, saw students as vessels into which educators must put knowledge, but in action, the banking concept stunts critical-thinking skills and limits students' ownership of knowledge, which reinforces oppression in educational systems.

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