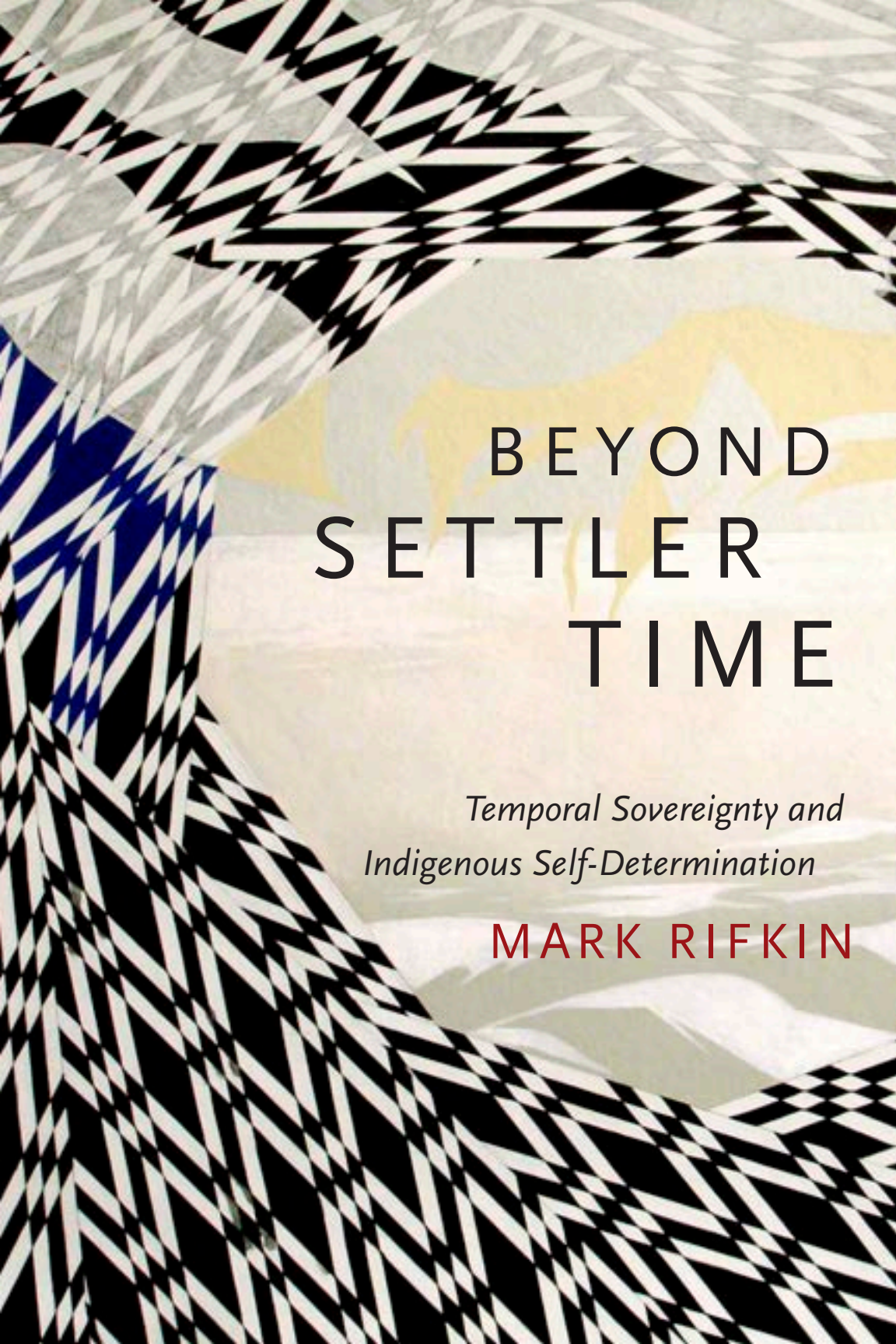

# BEYOND SETTLER TIME

*Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*

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# PREFACE

Native peoples occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time.[1] Either they are consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms. From this perspective, Native people(s) do not so much exist within the flow of time as erupt from it as an anomaly, one usually understood as emanating from a bygone era. In *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*, Paul Chaat Smith offers a particularly pointed commentary on non-natives' "absolute refusal to deal with [Indians] as just plain folks living in the present and not the past" (18), further noting, "Silence about our own complicated histories supports the colonizers' idea that the only real Indians are full-blooded, from a reservation, speak their language, and practice the religion of their ancestors" (26). Smith suggests that a fuller, less blinkered and amnesiac, version of history that can attend to the complexities of Native lives would counter the stereotypical circulation of images that position Indians as anachronisms. However, he also observes, "History promises to explain why things are and how they came to be this way, and it teases us by suggesting that if only we possessed the secret knowledge, the hidden insight, . . . we could perhaps master the present," adding that "no history is complete without knowing the history of the history" (53). Can a more capacious narrative of history provide a remedy to the appearance of Indians as temporal aberrations? Is "history" itself neutral with respect to the process of dislodging indigeneity from the flow of time? Is "the present"?

Arguing for the importance of a "history of the history" indicates the need to move beyond a broadened version of the same.[2] While insisting that Natives and non-natives "have a common history" after 1492 (74), Smith also emphasizes that Indigenous people(s) "see things differently. We come from a different place," one specifically shaped by "the land question," which "just won't go away" (85). In these formulations, he captures rather precisely the problem with

which I began, namely, the need to assert Indigenous being-in-time but the danger of doing so in ways that take the temporal frames generated in and by settler governance as themselves given—engaging with "complicated histories" whose distinction from those of non-natives is shaped by the ongoing dynamics of "the land question." As Anna Lee Walters asks, "When the real Indians succumbed a century ago, were their unborn grandchildren expected to yield their birthright also? Was the future laid to rest with the ancestors? Were Indians of two hundred years ago more Indian than those a century after them?"[3] If Native peoples are portrayed as always in the process of vanishing and as ceasing to be truly Indigenous if their practices deviate from a (stereotypical) model implicitly pegged to a particular moment in the past, usually the eighteenth or nineteenth century, then the answer seems to be, in Johannes Fabian's well-worn articulation, to insist on their *coevalness*.[4] Consequently, a good deal of scholarship has insisted that Indigenous persons and peoples inhabit the same time as settlers, engage with historical developments and change as a result, are moving toward the future like all other populations and peoples, and can adapt their modes of social life to current circumstances without ceasing to be authentic. However, an emphasis on coevalness tends to bracket the ways that the idea of a shared present is not a neutral designation but is, instead, defined by settler institutions, interests, and imperatives. To the extent that "the land question" means that the impression of the singularity of the space of the nation-state operates as an ongoing colonial imposition that denies Indigenous peoples' histories, sovereignties, and self-determination, why would the concept of inherently shared time be more liberatory or less conducive to settler superintendence? If, in Smith's terms quoted above, Natives "see things differently" due to Indigenous relations to place and peoplehood, would that not affect the meaning, conceptualization, and experience of time?

*Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* demonstrates the need for not just a more expansive or inclusive version of "history" or the "present" but an examination of the principles, procedures, inclinations, and orientations that constitute settler time as a particular way of narrating, conceptualizing, and experiencing temporality. I argue that asserting the shared modernity or presentness of Natives and non-natives implicitly casts Indigenous peoples as inhabiting the current moment and moving toward the future in ways that treat dominant non-native geographies, intellectual and political categories, periodizations, and conceptions of causality as given—as the background against which to register and assess Native being-in-time. In this way I seek to raise questions about the meaning and implications of the pursuit of forms of temporal recognition. Conversely, the book explores the

texture of Indigenous temporalities, seeking to theorize and engage the presence of Native experiences of becoming that shift in relation to new circumstances while remaining irreducible to non-native spatial and temporal formations. Examining a range of kinds of sources, including film, government reports, fiction, histories, and autobiography, I explore the potential for conceptualizing and tracing modes of Native time that exceed the terms of non-native mappings and histories. The project is organized as a series of meditations on particular kinds of temporal tensions—ways that Indigenous forms of time push against the imperatives of settler sovereignty.

The book takes inspiration from the role of relativity within physics in challenging the commonsensical conception of time as neutral, universal, and inherently shared. Within post-Einsteinian notions of time, there is no such thing as an absolute time that applies everywhere at once. Instead, the experience and calculation of time are contingent. Simultaneity depends on one's inertial frame of reference, such that two observers who are moving with respect to each other will not agree on when an event occurs or on other aspects of time's passage. If in physics a *frame of reference* refers to relative motion, we also can think about that concept in more socially resonant ways. Such collective frames comprise the effects on one's perception and material experience of patterns of individual and collective memory, the legacies of historical events and dynamics, consistent or recursive forms of inhabitance, and the length and character of the timescales in which current events are situated. Together, these elements of temporal experience provide a background that orients quotidian experiences of time and change, giving shape, direction, and meaning to them. As in the account offered by relativity, there is no inherently privileged or mutual "now" (or sense of time's passage more broadly) shared by disparate frames of reference. Through Indian law and policy, Native peoples have been subjected to profound reorganizations of prior geographies and modes of inhabitance, forms of governance, networks of exchange, tempos of ordinary life, and dynamics of individual maturation in an attempt to reorder Indigenous temporalities, to remake them in ways that fit non-native timescapes of expansion and dispossession. Employing notions of temporal multiplicity opens the potential for conceptualizing Native continuity and change in ways that do not take non-native frames of reference as the self-evident basis for approaching Indigenous forms of persistence, adaptation, and innovation. This book aims, then, to pluralize temporality so as to open possibilities for engaging with Indigenous self-articulations, forms of collective life, and modes of self-determination beyond their incorporation or translation into settler frames of reference. In this way it seeks to open conceptual room for addressing Native collective

articulations and experiences of time that exceed non-native accounts—for engaging expressions of temporal sovereignty.

The book focuses on particular kinds of temporal knottings. While proceeding from the mid-nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century, it does not offer a history as such, and each chapter reaches across periods. In place of arguing for temporal recognition, being seen as equally "modern" or part of a shared "present," the chapters gesture toward temporal sovereignty—the need to address the role of time (as narrative, as experience, as immanent materiality of continuity and change) in struggles over Indigenous landedness, governance, and everyday socialities. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each take up a particular issue that poses problems in seeking to think in Native time, and each one seeks to trace varied impositions of settler time and the ways they foreclose Indigenous temporal frames of reference. After an initial chapter that lays out the project's theoretical and methodological commitments, the chapters move from analysis of the limits of dominant accounts of national time to consideration of everyday negotiations with the temporality imposed by Indian policy, and the final chapter discusses Indigenous people's (and peoples') means of envisioning futurity through connections across time and with nonhuman entities.

The second chapter, "The Silence of Ely S. Parker," addresses the representation of the Civil War in the movie *Lincoln* (2012) as an occasion for considering the marginalization of Native peoples and processes of settler occupation in conventional narratives of national history. The Civil War usually functions as the fundamental demarcation line in periodizing U.S. history, and it often is taken as marking a crucial change in the character of the political union and the nation as a whole. The movie affectively invests in the war—through the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of the institution of chattel slavery—as redeeming the principles of equality and freedom promised in the Revolution. This way of narrating the Civil War and emancipation might be understood as performing a temporality of exception, in which the war functions as a caesura in the evolution of the national union. *Lincoln* suggests how the Civil War's almost ubiquitous role in envisioning national history occludes engagement with histories of Native presence and dispossession—an elision that can be registered in the mute figure of Ely S. Parker, who appears in the film alongside Ulysses S. Grant while never being named. Focusing on the continuities of Indian policy and its aggressions across the period of the war, the chapter addresses the Dakota War of 1862 and Parker's role in Indian affairs. I attend to how figures of exception are mobilized within official and popular discourses in ways that efface Native experiences of time, casting Indigenous resistance to displacement as an inexplicable eruption rather than a response to accreting

forms of state-sanctioned invasion. The focus on the Civil War as a signal event within national time gains meaning in the context of the presumption of the necessary persistence of the settler-state, normalizing settler sovereignty as a condition for narrating and experiencing U.S. history. In contrast, the Dakota War and Parker's career highlight alternative renderings of persistence in which the national union continually reemerges through its violent imposition on existing peoples, territorialities, sovereignties, and temporalities. Turning to the writings of Charles Alexander Eastman, the chapter addresses how the violence of the Indian Wars and of the treaty system becomes part of the self-understanding of the next generation. Eastman's texts offer an account of nineteenth-century history and its legacies in which the coordinates, trajectories, and implications center on the continuing possibilities for Native life and peoplehood (including as national subjects) amid ongoing occupation, in ways quite disjunct from conventional fixation on the supposed epochal shift brought by the Civil War.

The third chapter, "The Duration of the Land," considers the difficulty of negotiating between an allotment-imposed framework and extant Osage modes of becoming. Allotment sought to inculcate particular kinds of temporal consciousness and practice, in an attempt to "civilize" Natives into normative non-native life cycles in ways that would reaffirm the coherence and dominance of U.S. jurisdiction. Under this policy the federal government worked to reorganize everyday Native activity at all levels, from homemaking to work, education, and land use, aiming to reorder the social landscape of Indigenous territories. However, even while subject to these forms of compulsion, Native people continued to experience such changes from the perspective of their own temporal formations, shaped by their ongoing occupancy in their homelands. In the novel *Sundown*, John Joseph Mathews offers an account of the everyday affects generated by inhabiting allotment's field of force and its temporal inscriptions while also having a frame of reference shaped by Osage forms of sociospatiality. Critiquing the violence of allotment, the novel traces how it pressures Osages to conform to a vision of futurity defined by the state's extension of authority over Native peoples and lands. Reciprocally, Mathews explores how Osage histories (including the timescale of inhabitance in, and rhythms of relation to, that place) influence ordinary perception in ways that exceed the imaginings of Indian policy, while also indicating how such duration remains open to change on its own terms (including the emergence of the I'n-Lon-Schka and the Peyote religion). These experiences of time provide a background for the characters' sensations in ways that make them irreducible to a "now" shared with non-natives. Moreover, the text often marks the lived incommensurability of these temporal formations through figures of queerness. Mathews's repeated

invocation of the term *queer* alludes to the linkage within sexological and popular discourses of people of color with perversity due to their supposedly less advanced forms of family formation and polymorphous desire. *Sundown* plays on this set of associations to suggest how the main character's inability to fit in, including his supposed failure to be properly heterofamilially directed, might open onto a larger set of questions about how the imposition of settler governance becomes naturalized by presenting its rearrangement of ordinary life as merely expressive of the normal temporality of procreation. Conversely, such associations illustrate how Indigenous modes of history and placemaking are dismissed by being coded as an endemic, racially transmitted incapacity for civilization. In narrating the main character's sensation of disorientation with respect to events unfolding around him, the novel suggests that his feeling of queerness within the social formations created by allotment indicates less an Indian inability to adapt—to give up the deviant fixation on the past—than continuing and evolving Osage experiences of time that emerge out of enduring connections to their homeland.

The final chapter, "Ghost Dancing at Century's End," turns to the question of futurity, specifically the role of prophecy in Indigenous temporal formations. The most well-known example of this phenomenon is the Ghost Dance, which usually refers to the late nineteenth-century movement engendered by the visions of a Northern Paiute man named Wovoka. Inasmuch as the Ghost Dance has been cast as a response to the deprivations caused by Indian policy, culminating in the Wounded Knee massacre (1890), it circulates as the sign of the end of an era, in which the closing of the frontier indicates the becoming past of Native sovereignties that are not directly superintended (or overridden entirely) by settler claims and governance. For this very reason, the memory of the Ghost Dance serves as a powerful entry point for considering the work of prophecy, in its challenge to settler narratives of the historical inevitability of Indian subordination and disappearance. Novels at the end of the twentieth century take up the Ghost Dance and its continuing influence, highlighting the capacity of prophecy to disorient non-native conceptions of realness with respect to time and Native peoples' place in it. Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* mark and refuse the ways that Native histories continually are translated as tales of loss (of authenticity, of proper bloodedness, of connection to "tradition") within dominant settler conceptions of time. More than highlighting the vitality of Indigenous presentness, these novels offer accounts of the Ghost Dance that unfold the power of vision and spirit in connecting quotidian experiences of time to ongoing formations of being and becoming by Indigenous peoples in their homelands

(the scope of which is broadly framed). Rather than being a remarkable occurrence, prophecy in the texts emerges in response to everyday forms of relationship and struggle. Its occurrence indicates less a rupture in time than the ways other-than-chronological forms of experience remain immanent within daily life, and the texts suggest how such ordinary sensations reciprocally give rise to prophecy and are intensified by it, with commonplace events and dynamics creating the conditions for action by entities that likely would be characterized by non-natives as supernatural. Rejecting reproductively inflected narratives of inheritance or declension, Alexie's and Silko's texts elaborate the intimacy of modes of prophetic reach across time, emphasizing the possibilities for self-determination and Indigenous duration that arise in being out of sync with settler time.

# NOTES

## PREFACE

1. This preface serves as more of a sketch than a fully fleshed-out contextualization of my work within existing scholarship. For such references and engagements, see chapter 1.

2. In my exploration of this issue, I owe a particular debt to the dissertation work of Jason Cooke. While his approach is different from mine, his analysis played a crucial role in inspiring my own.

3. Walters, *Talking Indian*, 135.

4. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

## ONE. *Indigenous Orientations*

1. Here I am alluding to Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity, and I will return to the question of frame of reference later in this chapter.

2. Cordova, *How It Is*, 108.

3. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

4. On acceleration as a mode of colonization, see Collins, *Global Palestine*, 79–108.

5. The notion of being "between two worlds" often has been used as a way of characterizing mixed-blood Native people, those who live off-reservation and those who have been educated in primarily white institutions, among other forms of "hybridity." Employed in this way, the phrase tends to focus on "cultural" difference at the expense of attending to ongoing modes of colonial power and its effects on Indigenous people(s), as well as to present Natives as if any exposure to anything non-native led to a fall from a prelapsarian Indian wholeness. However, in *Remember This!* Waziyatawin Angela Wilson observes that the Dakota phrase usually translated as "liv[ing] in two worlds" literally means "being tied to two states of being" or involving "two ways of knowing" (116, 134), and the concept might be recuperated in this sense of referring to modes of being, knowing, and becoming, in contrast to the image of sealed-off spaces of purity.

6. Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xvi. Focused as it is on the complex dynamics of peoplehood over time in relation to the violences of settler occupation, Miranda's text serves as an immensely useful touchstone in thinking through the questions about temporality posed in this chapter.