

**AMERICAN
SETTLER
COLONIALISM**
A History

Walter L. Hixson



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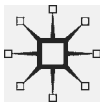
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The memorial at Gnadenhutten. Photograph by Wade Wilcox

Preface

Driving on Interstate 77 near Coshocton, Ohio, you are in what used to be the land of the Lenni Lenape, better known as the Delaware Indians.¹ Exiting the Interstate and driving east on US 36, it is only a few miles to the small town of Gnadenhutten (“tents of grace”). There, near the banks of the Muskingum River, you will find the simple, peacefully shaded memorial marking the historic site where for many years in the eighteenth century, Delaware Indians, who had converted to Christianity, lived and farmed with Moravian missionaries of mostly German ancestry.

Gnadenhutten embodied *colonial ambivalence*, as it underscored the wide range of possible relationships between peace and war on the North American borderlands. It represented adaptation, accommodation, and tolerance as opposed to violent conflict between Indians and Euro-Americans. The missionaries showed their willingness to coexist with Indians by establishing the United Brethren mission and striving to save the Indians’ souls. The Delaware who lived there embodied ambivalent relations through their willingness to convert to Protestantism, and to embrace pacifism.

Colonial ambivalence (discussed more fully in Chapter 1) existed throughout the North American borderlands over some four centuries of European colonization. The borderlands provided a vast tableau of intercultural exchange, competing desires, diplomacy, accommodation, and resistance. Indians had lived in communities united by regional networks of trade and exchange for centuries before Europeans arrived on the continent. The colonial encounter brought sweeping changes that affected Indians everywhere. Having no choice but to adapt and adjust to the newcomers, they did so in a variety of ways. The indigenes variously exchanged culture and conducted an extensive trade with the interlopers, negotiated with them, allied with them in warfare against other whites as well as other Indians, joined their families and communities, adopted their ways, and converted to the European religions. Some tried their best, as a Shawnee man once put it, to “walk the white man’s road.”²

For their part the Euro-American settlers displayed fear and admiration, revulsion and desire, for indigenous people. They ate with them, traded with them, sometimes lived, raised children, and worshipped with them; exchanged the pipe, negotiated and allied with them; adopted indigenous methods of hunting and of warfare; wore their moccasins and leggings, and learned their techniques of “wilderness” survival; walked on their paths, canoed their streams, and adopted their place names. Newly arrived colonists often expressed shock at the extent to which their “civilized” European brethren had come to resemble the indigenes.

Despite these examples of accommodation and hybridity, Euro-Americans were not culturally equipped to accept Indians as their equals with legitimate claims to the land. They viewed “heathen,” transient, hunting-based societies as inferior to Christian settler societies. Palpable cultural differences based on economy, land use, gender roles, spirituality, and much else underscored the distinctions drawn between the self and the other. Euro-American settlers imagined that it was their destiny to take control of colonial space and nothing would deter them from carrying out that project. Many came to view *the very existence* of Indians as an impediment to individual and national aspirations.³

Settler colonization thus ultimately overwhelmed ambivalence and ambiguity. Indians, who had used and changed the land for centuries, proved willing to share land with the newcomers but not simply to give it up to the settlers. The Euro-Americans, however, were on a mission to take command over colonial space, a process that entailed demarcation and control, boundaries, maps, surveys, treaties, seizures, and the commodification of the land.

* * *

In the late winter of 1782, a group of militiamen from Virginia and Pennsylvania entered Gnadenhutzen, where they found a large group of Indians collecting the corn harvest that had been left behind in the fall. Although the American settlers knew that the Indians at Gnadenhutzen were peaceful and mostly Christians, they decided to kill all of them anyway. In a chilling display of the coexistence of democracy and genocide on the American borderlands, the settlers first held a vote on what to do with the indigenous Moravian converts. Indiscriminate slaughter won out.

On March 8 and 9, the Americans executed and scalped 96 Indians at Gnadenhutzen. After a night filled with terror, song, and prayer, one Indian after another—including 39 children—was forced to kneel, then bludgeoned to death with a heavy cooper’s mallet until the executioner’s arm tired and he gave way to a second. Two teenagers—one scalped and secreting himself beneath the carnage of the dead—survived to recount the horror.

The massacre at Gnadenhutzen stemmed from the desire of the perpetrators to bring an end to the very colonial ambivalence that the United Brethren mission represented. Enraged by Indian assaults on borderland communities, which had killed friends and family members, the militiamen pursued their quest for blood revenge at the expense of non-combatant Indians who only sought to provide food for their people. The borderland settlers had long resented efforts, first on the part of the British and then on the part of the Continental army, to conduct trade and strategic alliances with Indians. Not all of the militiamen favored the executions, yet most voted for it nonetheless because they did not want to be viewed by their fellow settlers as coddling savages. Many Americans subsequently condemned the atrocity and an investigation ensued, but, as throughout US history, no one would be convicted and punished for killing Indians.⁴

The settlers had no monopoly on blood revenge and indiscriminate violence, which were deeply rooted in indigenous traditions. In the wake of the

Gnadenhutten massacre, after an Indian coalition defeated a settler invasion force in north-central Ohio, the Delaware and their allies slaughtered their captives and subjected the commander, William Crawford, to a hideous array of sadistic torture prolonging the agony of his death. The indigenes stripped Crawford naked; painted his face black for death; cut off his scalp, nose, and ears; and then slow-roasted him at the stake. Crawford's demise permeated narratives of borderland warfare, underscoring the inherent savagery of the Indians and justifying the cycle of borderland violence.⁵

* * *

The killings at Gnadenhutten, like other massacres throughout American and other nation's histories, were not isolated events; rather they reflected a broader history of settler colonization within an even broader history of global colonialism. Whether they wanted to slaughter the Delaware and other Indians or not, the vast majority of settlers wanted them *removed* from the land so that it might be cultivated by a more modern and even providentially destined people. Gnadenhutten signaled that by 1782 the time for ambivalence and seeking out a middle ground was over: the settlers wanted total security, assurance of their exclusive claim to colonial space. The militiamen informed one of the Moravian missionaries in the wake of the massacre, "When they killed the Indians the country would be theirs, and the sooner this was done the better!"⁶

The history of Gnadenhutten—ambivalent relationships giving way to indiscriminate violence and Indian removal—in many respects is the history of the "settlement" of the United States. At the beginning of his book on another massacre, this one of Apaches in Arizona in 1871, Karl Jacoby observes that violence against Indians is "at once the most familiar and most overlooked subject in American history." He argues, "The true magnitude of the violent encounter with the indigenous inhabitants of North America remains unacknowledged even today. So too are its consequences and contingencies unexplored."⁷

Jacoby has identified a paradox that a postcolonial history of American settler colonialism can help us to understand and explain. The history of Indian removal *is* familiar; in a sense virtually every American and many others throughout the world know about it. Popular histories, from *Century of Dishonor* in 1881 to *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in 1970, have long since chronicled and eulogized the dispossession and displacement of the American Indian.⁸

This study goes beyond a simple narrative of massacres and conquest by framing Indian removal within a context of settler colonialism. I narrate a comprehensive history of American Indian removal in order to convey the magnitude as well as the violence of the settler colonial project. I also argue that the long and bloody history of settler colonialism laid a foundation for the history of American foreign policy—and especially its penchant for righteous violence. This study thus connects the history of Indian removal with other nineteenth-century American wars to illuminate patterns of counterinsurgency and indiscriminate warfare deeply rooted in colonial history, carrying through the nineteenth century, and indeed to the present day.

While my own background is in diplomatic history, I have sought to forge connections with other subfields of American history, to reach across disciplines. Such crossings are infrequent because of the surprisingly rigid boundaries erected by academic specialization. Within American history alone, subfields on the pre-Revolutionary era, the early Republic, Western history, Indian history, diplomatic history, military history, and American studies have their own members, annual meetings, specialized journals, and book and article prizes. Balkanization promotes a certain degree of gatekeeping while status and promotion typically derive from archival research in one's own subfield. Synthetic and theoretical work is discouraged as arcane and outmoded; identification of continuities dismissed as simplistic. The “c” and “g” words—colonialism and genocide—are rarely invoked.

Discussion of violent Indian removal thus has become strangely passé. Owing in no small part to the sensational success of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, many Indians and the overwhelmingly non-indigenous scholars of Indian history have for years steered clear of accounts centered on the victimization of Indians by Euro-Americans. They grasp that a maudlin sentimentalism, ironically, tends to dehumanize Indians by denying them historical agency and leaving the impression that all of the Indians were “killed off” (in fact more than five million people identify themselves as indigenous North Americans today). With justification, scholars thus avoid writing narratives in which Indians function purely as victims of the man's white aggression, with virtually no attention paid to indigenous culture and colonial ambivalence. Scholars in the dynamic fields of Indian history and borderland studies emphasize indigenous cultures and agency, the complexities and ambivalence of specific borderland situations, cultural brokers and go-betweens. In the field of American history, studies focused on Euro-American drives, removal policies, and killing of Indians have been branded Eurocentric or teleological and relegated to the margins.

Indigenous-centered and borderland studies were and are much needed, typically insightful, and make possible a new synthesis incorporating Indian agency and colonial ambivalences into a broader narrative. In this book, that narrative centers on the continent-wide and centuries-long settler colonial project of dispossessing indigenous people. As Indians mounted an anticolonial resistance, American settler colonialism entailed the application of sustained and often indiscriminate violence. Borderland warfare gave rise to an “American way of war,” which manifested in the Mexican War, the Civil War, and the “Philippine Insurrection,” and indeed has carried over into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Counterinsurgency and indiscriminate warfare did not originate in the search-and-destroy operations in the jungles of Vietnam, but rather sunk their roots over centuries of North American settler colonization.

Only by synthesizing and conceptualizing over a broad sweep of American postcolonial history can we address the “true magnitude” and consequences of the “violent encounter with the indigenous inhabitants of North America” to which Jacoby referred. I discuss these issues more fully in Chapter 1, which locates this study within historiography and within postcolonial studies. Chapters 2, 3, 4, and

6 analyze American Indian removal and borderland warfare. Chapter 5 frames the Mexican and Civil Wars as part of a broader history of settler colonialism and borderland violence. The colonialisms of Alaska and Hawai'i (Chapter 7) offer different frames of comparison from the continental experience. Chapter 8 addresses the issue of continuity and discontinuity in the history of American colonialism through an analysis of the history of intervention, indiscriminate warfare, colonialism, and postcolonialism in the Philippines.

Chapter 9 discusses the ways in which indigenous people not only survived but also struggled for change in the wake of the centuries of violent dispossession. The legacies of settler colonialism, integral to postcolonial studies, remain formidable, as they continue to affect the lives of indigenes and indeed of all those who live in colonized societies.

The Conclusion focuses on the internalization of righteous violence within American history and the nation's foreign policy. The violence of empire did not victimize the indigenous people alone. Colonialism "dehumanizes even the most civilized man," Amié Césaire pointed out in *Discourse on Colonialism*. The colonizer "gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out." In the Conclusion, I explore the ways in which this "boomerang of savagery" came hurtling back on the United States itself.

* * *

Other scholars have helped me along the way with efforts both great and small, from reading multiple drafts, to offering encouragement, to suggesting literature. In actuality I have hundreds of scholars in multiple subfields to thank for the books and articles that they have written over the years and which inform this study. None of these scholars, mentioned here or cited in the work, should be held accountable for the final product, though many of them made it much better than it otherwise would have been. Shelley Baranowski, Kevin Kern, Margaret Jacobs, Sherry Smith, and one of the preeminent theorists of settler colonialism, Lorenzo Veracini, all read full or partial drafts at various stages and helped me a great deal. Others who read, criticized, and suggested literature include Christine Lober, Maurice and Kathryn Labelle, David Zietsma, Ted Easterling, Kelsey Walker, Andrew Sternisha, Michael Sheng, Elizabeth Mancke, Martin Wainwright, Stephen Harp, Janet Klein, Michael Graham, Constance Bouchard, Lesley Gordon, Benjamin Harrison, Gary Hess, Brian Halley, Philip Howard, Kelly Hopkins, Anne Foster, Eric Hinderaker, David Ryan, Karine Walther, Kristin Hoganson, Daniel Margolies, Wade Wilcox, and Kym Rohrbach. The Hixsons—especially Kandy but also Bud, Emma, and Maiza—always encourage my work. Zoe was always there for a pat on the head or a yawn and a stretch while I was actually doing it.

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Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History, and Theory

This book analyzes settler colonialism over the sweep of Euro-American history. It is neither a simple narrative of conquest nor a study devoted solely to ferreting out indigenous agency within the colonial encounter. The narrative instead identifies ambivalences—the myriad ways in which both the “colonizer” and the “colonized” reconfigured their identities as they traded, allied, assimilated, negotiated, resisted, and otherwise carved out “third spaces” within the colonial encounter. Despite these ambivalences, American settler colonialism ultimately drove an ethnic cleansing of the continent.¹

I employ the trope of ambivalence as a framework both to incorporate Indian agency and to address the complexity of the colonial encounter. Borderlands history emphasizes local and regional studies and the distinctiveness of each colonial situation. There was no single “frontier,” of course, but rather many borderlands with fluid geographic boundaries. Mixed ethnicities and convoluted identities, contestation over sovereignty, and varieties of cultural, economic, and social change characterized the borderlands. Yet underlying the history of all regions was dispossession of the indigenous residents backed by violence.

In the end, settler colonialism was a zero-sum game. Settlers—operating from the bottom up but backed by all levels of government—would accept nothing less than removal of Indians and complete control of the land. As they carried out Indian removal across the breadth of the continent, Americans internalized a propensity for waging indiscriminate violence against their savage foes. Born of settler colonialism, this boomerang of violence would play out over the sweep of US history and help define an “American way of war” in the process.²

This study flows from the premise that the United States should be perceived and analyzed *fundamentally* as a settler colonial society. The American “imperial settler state” originated in the context of Indian removal and forged powerful continuities over space and time. American history is the most sweeping, most violent, and most significant example of settler colonialism in world history. American settler colonialism evolved over the course of three centuries, resulting in millions of deaths and displacements, while at the same time creating

the richest, most powerful, and ultimately the most militarized nation in world history.³

Postcolonial Studies

This book situates itself within postcolonial studies, a term that requires contextualization. The absence of the hyphen distinguishes “postcolonial” from “post-colonial,” a term that might suggest, say, the study of India in the aftermath of British colonialism, or Indonesia following the departure of the Dutch. Hence “postcolonial” does not impart a temporal meaning in the way that the hyphenated “post-colonial” might bring to mind post–World War II decolonization. “Postcolonial” relates to colonialism, to be sure, but in much more expansive ways than the hyphenated form.⁴

Postcolonial studies link the colonized past with the present and the future, thereby facilitating analysis over a *longue durée*⁵ of history. The “postcolonial era” is in a sense timeless, thus challenging the historian’s penchant for tidy periodizations, insofar as while there are beginnings, there is no end; the legacies of colonialism persist. The field facilitates comparative studies, as colonialism was an international phenomenon that profoundly influenced (and continues to influence) the entire world. Postcolonial studies blend history, culture, and geopolitics within a “context of colonialism and its consequences.” They encourage efforts “to look critically at the world and the knowledge and representations that have been made about it.”⁶ Because postcolonial studies have been defined and used in different ways, one must be wary of those who either condemn or heap praise upon it.⁷

Postcolonial critique draws upon classic theorists including Frantz Fanon, who is sometimes credited with “inventing” postcolonial studies. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon identified a “massive psycho-existential complex” under colonialism, within which “The black man is not a man . . . for the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.”⁸ Fanon’s exploration of “the various attitudes that the Negro adopts in contact with white civilization”—the white mask over the black skin—stimulated postcolonial analysis, inspiring a virtual subfield dubbed “critical Fanonism.” In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a more revolutionary Fanon inspired anticolonialism as well as the black power movement with his advocacy of violent resistance to colonial oppression. According to Fanon, the West—including the United States, a former colony that “became a monster”—had nothing to offer to true liberation struggles, and he advised, “Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them.”⁹

In *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) Aimé Césaire preceded Fanon in emphasizing the ways in which the colonizer destroyed the identity of the colonized through “thingification.” The colonized person could not be an individual but rather was a “thing”—a savage, a barbarian, a nigger, and so on. Colonization thus worked to “decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word.” Similarly, Albert Memmi argued that colonized people were perpetually degraded as

the colonizer “emphasizes those things which keep him separate,” precluding the evolution of “a joint community.”¹⁰

Building on the work of these classic theorists, as well as on the philosophy of Michel Foucault, Edward Said extended the analytic framework by introducing the concept of “Orientalism.” Said showed how literary discourse established a powerful binary between Western modernity—viewed as rational, progressive, manly, and morally and racially superior—and the non-Western other, typically represented as heathen, primitive, treacherous, and de-masculinized. Orientalism shifted attention to the ways in which “colonial knowledge” shaped the “encounter” between the metropole and the periphery in a variety of global settings.¹¹

Colonial Ambivalence

Going beyond black skin and white masks, the colonizer and the colonized, Homi Bhaba identified ambivalence within the colonial encounter. Drawing insight from the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s seminars on the formation of individual identity, Bhaba destabilized the sharply drawn binary between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhaba explained that the supposedly all-powerful colonist actually depended on the supposedly totally subservient colonized subject in order to formulate his own identity (e.g., “I am white and civilized, he is brown and savage”). Rather than being fixed or monolithic, colonial identities therefore were constructed, unstable, and required constant repetition and affirmation in order to assert them as being real. Bhaba’s insight illuminated a “third space” between the colonizer and the colonized, opening the way for considerations of *hybridity* within the colonial encounter.¹²

Critical to Bhaba’s analysis was the ambivalence inherent in the colonizer’s desires as well as the indigene’s capacity for resistance. The colonizer desired the colonized other, for example for his attunement with nature or sexual liberation, and yet was repulsed by his primitiveness and the dangers that he posed. The slippages and uncertainty within the colonizer’s identity, including taking on some of the characteristics of the “savage,” produced anxiety and instability. At the same time, ambivalence enabled the colonized other the capacity for agency and resistance because the relations were not as fixed as they appeared to be, but rather were inherently unstable and malleable. Bhaba argued that through, for example, mimicry or mockery the indigene could appear to embrace the colonizer’s authority or display his contempt for it. The colonized subject could also appropriate or adapt to the colonizer’s resources and knowledge for his or her own uses and benefit. The supposedly helpless colonized subject thus had the capacity to cultivate, as Bhaba put it, “strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”¹³

On the North American borderlands, colonial ambivalence complicated relations between settlers and indigenes. Masses of Americans empathized with Indians, condemned treaty violations and aggression against them, and strove to shepherd them to civilization and salvation. Almost none of these people, however,

perceived Indians as having legitimate claims to occupy colonial space. They often expressed sympathy for Indians even as they advocated removing them from their homelands in order to “save” them. Countless numbers of Indians went a long way toward accommodating Euro-Americans by trading and interacting with them, negotiating and allying with them in warfare, converting to their religions, and showing a willingness to share space.

The persistence of destabilizing ambivalences and uncertainties ultimately could only be addressed through the virtual *elimination* of the indigene. Arriving in massive numbers, Euro-Americans assumed entitlement to the land and demanded total security from the threat of indigenous resistance. By occupying “middle ground” with Euro-Americans, Indians destabilized the colonizer’s identity and his presumed providential destiny to inherit the land. This persistent rupturing of the colonialist fantasy combined with “savage” anticolonial resistance had a traumatic impact on the colonizer. Euro-Americans thus engaged in often-indiscriminate violence aimed at fulfilling the self-serving vision of Indians as a “dying race.”

Borderland studies and postcolonial studies have focused mostly on the indigenes and the complexities of local situations. But a history focused overwhelmingly on indigenous peoples and their experiences is one-dimensional. A history of settler colonialism must by definition also “focus on the settlers, on what they do, and how they think about what they do.”¹⁴ In this study I attempt to probe into the psyche, the ambivalences, and the resort to violence of the colonizer as well as the colonized. The analysis encompasses the complexity of the colonial encounter but suggests that ambivalence and hybridity created unwanted contingencies and psychic anxieties that tended ultimately to be reconciled through violence.

Settler Colonial Studies

The central arguments of this book are framed by settler colonial studies, a relatively recent and cutting-edge field of inquiry. “Settler colonialism as a specific formation has not yet been the subject of dedicated systematic analysis,” Lorenzo Veracini notes.¹⁵ Academic conferences in 2007 and 2008, followed by the launching of a journal dedicated to settler colonial studies, have propelled the new field forward.

Settler colonialism refers to a history in which settlers drove indigenous populations from the land in order to construct their own ethnic and religious national communities. Settler colonial societies include Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. What primarily distinguishes settler colonialism from colonialism proper is that the settlers came not to exploit the indigenous population for economic gain, but rather to remove them from colonial space. Settlers sought “to construct communities bounded by ties of ethnicity and faith in what they persistently defined as virgin or empty land,” Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen point out. A “logic of elimination and not exploitation” fueled settler colonialism. The settlers “wished less

to govern indigenous peoples or to enlist them in their economic ventures than to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement.” As Veracini succinctly puts it, “Settler colonial projects are specifically interested in turning indigenous peoples into refugees.”¹⁶

Under “conventional” colonialism the colonizer eventually departs, but under settler colonialism the colonizer means to occupy the land permanently. “Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of the native societies,” Patrick Wolfe explains. “The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event.” Because it was *structural* rather than contingent, settler colonialism extended widely and outlasted colonialism and European imperialism. By a process of conquest and “the reproduction of one’s own society through long-range migration,” James Belich explains, “It was settlement, not empire that had the spread and staying power in the history of European expansion.”¹⁷

Settlers dispossessed indigenous people by establishing “facts on the ground” through mass migrations backed by violence. Hungry for land unavailable to them in Europe, settlers poured into new worlds, leaving metropolitan authorities struggling to keep pace. “Mobility and a lack of supervision enabled free subjects and citizens to scout for prospects and to squat,” John Weaver points out. “All frontiers attracted squatters whose possessory occupation was difficult to supplant.”¹⁸

The triangular relationship between settlers, the metropole, and the indigenous population distinguishes and defines settler colonialism. Settlers sought to remove and replace the indigenous population and in the process to cast aside the authority of the “mother” country. Settler colonies created their very identities through resolution of this dialectical relationship, in which indigenes disappeared and metropolitan authority was cast aside—the American Revolution being a prominent example. Thus, the ability to make both the indigenous and the exogenous metropolitan other “progressively disappear” established “the constitutive hegemony of the settler component.”¹⁹

The speed and intensity of explosive colonization overwhelmed indigenous peoples. As Belich notes, indigenes “could cope with normal European colonization [but] it was *explosive* colonization that proved too much for them.” Masses of settlers brought modernity with them, as they hewed out farms, domesticated animals, and built roads, bridges, canals, railroads, factories, towns, and cities, mowing down indigenous cultures in the process. The migrants “destroyed, crippled, swamped or marginalized most of the numerous societies they encountered,” constructing new societies at an astonishing pace.²⁰

If “sheer demographic swamping” failed to overwhelm the indigenous people, the modern societies linked advanced technology with lethal tropes of racial inferiority and indigenous savagery to effect ethnic cleansing campaigns.²¹ “The term ‘settler’ has about it a deceptively benign and domesticated ring which masks the violence of colonial encounters that produced and perpetrated consistently discriminatory and genocidal regimes against the indigenous peoples,” Annie Coombes notes. Settlers could be “dangerous people,” Belich adds, “especially when in full-frothing boom frenzy.”²²

This study embraces settler colonialism as a critically important interpretive framework, but one that requires theoretical and historical contextualization.

I accept Wolfe's argument that settler colonialism establishes a *structure*; however, the tendency of structuralism to forge rigid binaries can gloss over historical complexity and contingency. Bhaba's ambivalence thus provides an important contextualizing framework, one that I use to incorporate exceptions, qualifications, gray areas, and middle grounds between the colonizer and the colonized.

Space, Place, and Law

Culturally imagined and legally enshrined conceptions of space and place fueled settler colonialism. Outside of geography "the importance, complexity, and dynamism of space is frequently rendered invisible," yet space, as Doreen Massey observes, "is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation." Spatiality thus plays a central role in the production of knowledge and power. The way space is conceived, imagined, and framed has political consequences, for example as in the relationship between conceptions of globalization and neoliberal economic policies in the more recent past. As David Delaney points out, "Much of what is experientially significant about how the world is as it is and what it is like to be in the world directly implicates the dynamic interplay of space, law, meaning, and power."²³

Rather than being an empty void, space in this context is heavily laden with meaning. A culturally imagined and legally sanctioned relationship with the land creates the conditions and contingencies of social relations—the facts on the ground. In settler colonial societies, terms such as "frontier," "Manifest Destiny," and "homeland" assumed powerful symbolic meaning, creating emotional attachments. Legal claims such as the "Doctrine of Discovery" and "domestic dependent nations" bolstered these cultural ties to colonial space, while sanctioning dispossession and removal policies.

Profoundly divergent conceptions of place and space thus played a critical role in the colonial encounter. Over centuries, indigenous people had cultivated deeply rooted spiritual connections with the land from which the colonizer sought to remove them. The spiritual universe of indigenous societies revolved around nurturing and preserving reciprocal relations with the natural environment. This powerful sense of reciprocity carried over into relations with other peoples. When the universe of reciprocal relations was disrupted, indigenous warrior cultures typically lashed out in a quest for blood revenge.²⁴

For the settlers, violent indigenous resistance in contestation for colonial space functioned to reaffirm their own powerful constructions of imagined relationships with the land. Eurocentric notions of racial superiority, progress, and providential destiny thus propelled settler colonialism. Europeans denied or derided "primitive" concepts of land use, creating a colonial binary between land wasted by indigenes and land mobilized for progress by settlers. Framing indigenous people as indolent and wasteful justified removal and relocating them onto less desirable spaces. "Europeans' convictions about improvement and waste, their assumptions

about supposedly advanced and less advanced peoples, helped make the land rush unstoppable,” Weaver points out.²⁵

As they linked private property and individual landholding with freedom, progress, and national destiny, under God, settlers assumed control over colonial space. Colonial ambivalence, the relative balance of forces, and alliances determined the pace and timing of the settler advance. In the end, however, settler states would not stop short of establishing their authority over colonial space through mass migration, sanctioned under their laws, backed by violence.

Equipped with a higher manhood and a higher calling, settler colonials boldly conquered the wilderness, the outback; inherited the True North; and reclaimed the land of Zion. Having imagined powerful connections to their chosen lands, settlers defended them violently and at all cost.

Comparative Analysis

Settler colonial studies facilitate comparative analysis that reveals surprisingly similar histories evolving at different places and at different times. “The fact that settler societies resemble one another in several respects is not a consequence of conscious imitation,” Donald Denoon explains, “but of separate efforts to resolve very similar problems.”²⁶ As settler colonial studies are relatively new, Lynette Russell notes, “One of the future directions for research include detailed comparative studies.”²⁷

While this book homes in on American settlement, the United States emerged out of a broader history of global colonialism and especially of British settler colonialism.²⁸ “The course of American history,” Weaver points out, “connects deeply, extensively, and reciprocally with land-taking and land-allocation episodes in the histories of British settlement colonies.”²⁹ The American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and South African settler colonies shared common cultural traits and similar outlooks toward indigenous people—ambivalent attitudes as well as lethal ones—yet important distinctions remained.

Although Canada like the United States was a product of British settler colonialism, geographic and demographic distinctions constructed a different history with indigenous people. In essence Canada had far fewer settlers, far fewer indigenes, and plenty of space to avoid one another for a longer time. Contrary to popular mythology, British Canadians were neither wiser nor morally superior in their handling of Indian affairs; rather they felt less pressured to address the issue. Canadians were also preoccupied with internal divisions between French and English settlers and between maritime and interior provinces.³⁰ Not until the 1860s did the Canadian policies begin to resemble the American removal policies, but the scale and scope of conflict with the First Peoples was small compared with the United States. “Aside from the 1869 Matisse resistance in the Red River country and the 1885 Matisse and Indian uprising,” Roger Nichols points out, “the Canadian record featured little violence particularly when contrasted to what was happening at the same time in the United States.”³¹

In southern Africa both the much-mythologized Dutch “trekboers” and British settlers and investors colonized through violent dispossession of indigenous people. As in other settler societies, “the quest for more land continued relentlessly,” especially with the discovery of gold and diamonds. The colonizers cheated, killed, and removed the indigenes while the Dutch also enslaved them and, as in the United States and Australia, removed children from their families.³² In South Africa, as in the United States, Australia, and other settler colonial settings, “warrior resistance played into allegations of savagery, thus confirming unfitness for tribal or individual land title” and justifying violent retribution. Again, however, the scope and scale of the colonial violence, while hardly negligible, did not match the American experience.³³

The same was true of New Zealand (Aotearoa in the Maori language). New Zealand settlers purported to take a humanitarian approach to the Maori, who were dispossessed nonetheless by legal means in the wake of the disputed Treaty of Waitangi (1840).³⁴ As in the United States and other settler societies, disease took a severe toll on the Maori. The *Pakeha* (whites) “took it for granted that the Maori population would continue to decrease” as their own proliferated.³⁵ Thereafter, the settlers moved onto Maori land, as “frontier avarice throttled principal.” Beginning in 1860 the New Zealand Wars raged for a decade.³⁶ “Maori resistance was effective rather than futile until numbers overwhelmed them.” The Maori population steadily declined, as in other colonized societies, as they were “dominated demographically” in the wake of massive waves of immigration in the 1860s and 1870s.³⁷

The settler state that most closely mirrors the American experience is Australia. As in the United States, the ethnic cleansing of Australia extended across an entire continent, proved genocidal in its effects, and until very recently has been subjected to persistent historical denial. Ambivalence on the part of both colonizers and indigenes materialized in both societies, as did drives for religious salvation and assimilation. Both Australia and the United States adopted “reforms” that entailed cultural genocide, including national campaigns removing children from their families.³⁸

At the arrival of European settler colonialism in the late eighteenth century, from 750,000 to 1.5 million “Aborigines” lived on the continent. Ravaged by disease, dispossession, and indiscriminate slaughter, the number had plummeted to 31,000 by 1911.³⁹ In the early 1640s the Dutchman Abel Tasman was the first European to explore New Zealand, sight the Fiji Islands, and set down on the island south of the Australian mainland that is named after him today. More than a century later the three voyages of the legendary British seafarer James Cook from 1768 to 1779 spurred Anglophone settlement in the Pacific. Cook traversed the eastern coast of the continent and named it New South Wales. On April 29, 1770, he planted the British flag in Botany Bay, about 30 kilometers from modern-day Sydney. Cook made only limited contact with the natives whereupon tensions surfaced immediately. “All they seemed to want is for us to be gone,” he noted.⁴⁰

Despite this chilly reception, as in North America ambivalent relations including trade and cooperation characterized the early interaction between the British settlers and indigenous peoples. “Contact between explorers and Aborigines was often friendly and mutually satisfactory,” Henry Reynolds points out.⁴¹

The Europeans often depended on the aboriginal people for food, access to water, and generalized local know-how. Some Aborigines already had exposure to European commodities including pottery, cloth, and metal tools that had arrived through trade routes from Southeast Asia. The new settlers brought iron, guns, and other desirable trade goods.

As in the future United States, ambivalent relations gave way to violence as settlements expanded and the Europeans strove to drive out the indigenes, considered primitive and inferior. Both Americans and Australians displayed “relatively little use for indigenous people and a penchant for considering Aborigines and American Indians as impediments to progress,” Benjamin Madley notes. The colonizers perpetrated “a particularly high number of massacres” and displayed “surprisingly congruent tactics despite the fact that they occurred decades apart on separate continents and under different regimes, while targeting dozens of different indigenous peoples.”⁴² Settler colonization of Queensland, for example, resembled California, as settlers and squatters unrestrained by central government authority orchestrated massive cleansing campaigns replete with indiscriminate violence.⁴³

The most significant difference between US and Australian settler colonialism was that the Americans formally recognized Indian possession of the land and thus dispossessed them by means of ostensibly legal treaties, whenever possible. On the other hand, through their embrace of *terra nullius*—“land belonging to no one”—the Australian settler colonials adopted a more extreme version of the Doctrine of Discovery than in the United States. Under *terra nullius* the Australians considered the natives to be British subjects rather than independent peoples hence they would be dispossessed without legal wrangling.⁴⁴

Terra nullius, like American Manifest Destiny, constituted an “imperial fantasy” that enabled Australian settler colonialism and the ethnic cleansing of the continent. A romanticized national history in which people thrust rudely onto the barren shores “down under” became “a good and neighborly” community elided the history of settler invasion and destruction of Aboriginal culture. Colonial discourse depicted Australia as “a wild, untamed space that existed beyond the boundaries of colonial civilization.” As Rod Macneil points out, “The creation of a prehistoric landscape enabled colonization to be couched not in terms of appropriation and exploitation, but as progress and redemption.”⁴⁵

The similarities between the United States and Australia as well as other British settler societies suggest that American history is not exceptional. On the other hand, the *breadth* and *scope*—and thus the violence—of Euro-American settler colonialism have no parallel, not even in Australia.

Race, Gender, Religion, Nation

Settler colonialism typically unfolds in association with nation building. Constructions, hierarchies, and inclusions and exclusions pertaining to race, class, gender, religion, and nation enable settler communities to cohere. Often these constructions are comingled and mutually reinforcing. The settler community and

nation define themselves, expand and police their borders, and project their power into colonial space on the basis of these constructed hierarchies and exclusions. In constructing identity, exclusion of “the other” closes off their narratives and discourses while privileging one’s own.⁴⁶

It is in this sense that Fanon pointed out, “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World.” Without the colonized other, the European could not define his own identity through manliness, whiteness, godliness, progress, and the civilizing mission vis-à-vis the colonial world. Similarly, as Kevin Bruyneel has argued, “The very identity and meaning implied in the name *America* as the national identity of the United States was in no small part constituted through this nation’s real and imagined relationship with indigenous people.”⁴⁷ Likewise, Australia defined itself in opposition to the aboriginal other.

Neither “the people” nor “the races” actually exist rather they are based on a fictive ethnicity that becomes naturalized within the imagined nation. “For the nation to be itself, it has to be racially or culturally pure,” hence it becomes an “obsessional imperative” to drive out exogenous others. Constructions of race, gender, religion, and often a common language construct “a single national project that effectively neutralizes people’s differences” and thus enables the imagined community of the nation to cohere. Without these discourses, constructions, and demarcations of space “patriotism’s appeal would be addressed to no one.”⁴⁸

Colonial varieties of racial formation were often especially virulent as these discourses performed the representational work of sanctioning the extreme violence of slavery and genocide. Racism is an enduring human social formation that preceded modern colonialism and nationalism. Prior to the advent of Darwinian thought there existed an “archaic racism with genocidal potential, constituted by the visual othering of indigenous populations.” The discourse of scientific racism piled onto existing racisms and helped justify “the other’s expulsion from native lands, economic exploitation, destruction of the indigenous ecosphere and even eventual genocide.” Class tensions, closely intertwined with race, played out in colonial encounters. The removal of indigenes from the land created more wealth while promoting the perception among poor whites that they would have greater opportunity for advancement. In any case they could count themselves members of a “master” race.⁴⁹

Gendered constructions complemented racial exclusions as the two became mutually reinforcing under colonialism. “Persistent gendering” marginalized the feminine and thus exalted male power. Competition, aggression, control, power, and other traits of colonialism were distinctly male. Settler colonies exalted manliness, and regeneration of manhood, as they subdued savage foes and “tamed the frontier.” Colonialism simultaneously reinforced gendered practices within metropolitan societies, as the emphasis on woman’s proper place in the domestic sphere and white men as the protectors of vulnerable women affirmed male authority. On the other hand, women could gain agency by taking part in the colonial encounter, for example as missionaries or in promoting policies of child removal.⁵⁰

Gendered tropes feminized the “virgin” land and its conquest. Gendered colonial discourse often represented indigenous women as queens or alternatively as

enticing maidens. Their nakedness and lack of sexual inhibitions aroused desires otherwise repressed in the Christian West. Representations of the dark-skinned indigenous male threat to white women powerfully reinforced repression of the bestial male native yet the rape and enslavement of indigenous women by white men was a common and rarely punished occurrence. Captivity narratives, the specter of miscegenation, and of the proverbial “fate worse than death” pervaded colonial discourse.⁵¹

Western practices transformed gendered social and economic roles of indigenous people in settler societies. When engaged in civilizing missions, colonial authorities typically tried to convert male warriors into sedentary farmers and relegate women (who performed the agricultural work in most indigenous societies) to a domestic sphere. Colonialism altered family structures and “eroded many matrilineal or women-friendly cultures and practices, or intensified women’s subordination in colonized lands.”⁵² Colonialism enabled paternalist discourse viewing colonized peoples and their children as having undeveloped minds that needed to be molded, scolded, properly socialized, and ultimately the children removed to a civilized environment.

Christian missionaries promulgated many of the gendered Western practices, underscoring the centrality of religion in the colonial encounter. Settler colonials typically viewed their own projects as divinely inspired and providentially destined. Missionaries displayed colonial ambivalence, as they sought to “uplift” indigenes and save their souls, but this sort of paternalism produced cultural imperialism and encompassed genocidal practices such as child removal. Westerners thus showed little recognition or respect for indigenous spirituality. They often linked the “atheistical” and “diabolical” savages with biblical forces of evil. Manifestations of indigenous spirituality threatened these colonial discourses and thus inspired a violent response, for example in 1890 when the Sioux Ghost Dance preceded the Wounded Knee massacre (see Chapter 6). Tightly infused with concepts of space, race, and nation, religious discourse justified and propelled the settler colonial project.

Historical Denial

Historical distortion and denial are endemic to settler colonies. In order for the settler colony to establish a collective usable past, legitimating stories must be created and persistently affirmed as a means of naturalizing a new historical narrative. A national mythology displaces the indigenous past. “The settler seeks to establish a nation, and therefore needs to become native and to write the epic of the nation’s origin,” Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson point out. “The ‘origin’ is that which has no antecedent, so the presence of Ab-origines is an impediment.” *Becoming the indigene* required not only cleansing of the land, either through killing or removing, but sanitizing the historical record as well.

The critical sleight of hand in propagating a new national narrative was the settler’s displacement of the indigene. Increasingly, the settlers depicted themselves and their cultures as indigenous. As the inheritors of a “New World” and

cultivators of a “virgin land,” the settlers elided their actual historical role as invaders and conquerors of colonial space. “Empty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded,” Johnston and Lawson point out. “The word ‘settler’ was itself part of the process of invasion; it was literally a textual imposition on history.”⁵³

Even with the removal and marginalization of indigenes onto reservations or Bantustans their existence could not be forgotten entirely, yet that which remained could be subtly absorbed within the dominant culture. In the quest for authenticity the settler colonial societies appropriated the indigenous style of clothing—the buckskinned frontiersman for example—and adopted the “attributes and skills (the Mounties, cowboys, range-riders, gauchos, backwoodsmen), and in this way cemented their legitimacy.” They simultaneously romanticized the “noble savage” or relegated the indigenous past to the realm of place names and sports teams, subsuming the violence of conquest within the “liberating frivolity of play.” They also cultivated an “imperialist nostalgia,” as they produced stories, literature, and images focusing on the inevitable “passing” of the indigenous race, as in the “last of the Mohicans.”⁵⁴

These historical representations and cultural constructions notwithstanding, history remains a neuralgic subject in settler colonial societies. Denial and disavowal of the history of violent dispossession of the indigenes characterize settler societies. “Revisionist” challenges invariably meet with denunciation or marginalization rooted in the naïve assumption of the existence of a true and immutable sacred past. Hence in the 1990s “history wars” raged in both the United States and Australia, South Africa conducted “truth and reconciliation” hearings, while the debate over “post-Zionism” roiled Israeli society.⁵⁵

Historical denial helps explain why study of the United States within the context of both settler colonialism and postcolonialism has been relatively scarce and “especially controversial.” Even as postcolonial studies “has expanded its scope to include the United States,” Jenny Sharpe points out, “it has not addressed its status as an imperial power, past or present.”⁵⁶ Analysis of American imperialism has always been problematic. For generations, as the legendary diplomatic historian William Appleman Williams pointed out in 1955, “One of the central themes of American historiography is that there is no American Empire.” As they narrated the Cold War as a rigid binary pitting the “free world” against “godless communism,” consensus historians dismissed the very concept of American imperialism as “a stock expression in the Marxist vocabulary, connoting, to the leftist mind, both the wickedness and decay of capitalism.” To the extent the United States engaged in imperial policies, Julius Pratt explained in 1950, “peoples of primitive or retarded cultures” needed “guardians to guide and direct their development” hence the US Empire was “benevolent” and “accepted by those living under it.”⁵⁷

While Americans trumpeted the nation’s commitment to diversity and democracy both at home and abroad, “The irony of this image in the light of its conquistadorial and slave-holding past required great ideological effort.” The “fantasy” that enabled US citizens “to achieve their national identity through the disavowal of US imperialism was American exceptionalism,” Donald Pease argues.⁵⁸ Structures of denial, disavowal, and forgetting comingled with fantasies

of chosenness provided Americans with “an imaginary relation to actual state colonialism.”⁵⁹

To the extent Americans have acknowledged the existence of a colonial empire, it is typically associated with the Spanish-American War and the annexations and taking of colonies after 1898. However, postcolonial analysis illuminates a much longer process of colonialism and empire building, long preceding the American Revolution and rooted in settler colonization.⁶⁰

Indigenous Agency and Borderland Studies

For more than a generation now, ethno-historians and specialists in indigenous American history have brilliantly illuminated the agency and ambivalences of Native American history and culture.⁶¹ This scholarship responded in part to a largely one-sided (though nonetheless useful at the time) historiography that emerged from the minority-conscious 1960s, emphasizing the imperial conquest of Indians by white Americans. Under this framing, indigenes functioned purely as victims of aggression, burying their hearts at Wounded Knee following their conquest by whites whose genocidal drives were motivated by “the metaphysics of Indian hating.”⁶² These works tended to overlook indigenous agency as well as ambivalences and historical complexity, and to accept uncritically the identities of the colonizer and the colonized.

By contrast, studies, focused on the agency of indigenous Americans and ambivalent cross-cultural relations, represent arguably the most productive field in American history over the past generation. By “facing East” instead of West, historians have unearthed a wealth of knowledge on the indigenous tribes, thus transcending the depiction of Indians as mere victims in the inevitable if lamentable passing of the noble race. Influenced in part by postcolonial frameworks, including Bhaba’s ambivalence, these scholars have appropriately complicated and nuanced white–Indian relations. They have explored Indian agency in terms of spirituality, culture, gender and social relations, trade and economics, intertribal cooperation and conflict with Europeans as well as other Indians, environmental impact, and much else. Perhaps most important, by illuminating times and places in which indigenes and Euro-Americans and mixed bloods interacted and coexisted with some degree of understanding and mutual benefit, these studies suggest that violent removal was not the only option within the colonial encounter.⁶³

Indigenous people thus not only confronted the European expansion, but also *participated* in a complex and contested colonial encounter. For many indigenes the colonizer–colonized dyad was not their primary concern, at least not initially, as their attention remained focused on longstanding relationships with other indigenous groups. Rather than simply bloody rivals from the outset, Indians and Euro-Americans frequently were trade and alliance partners, neighbors, wives, employers, and co-religionists. Powerful “tribes” such as the Iroquois, the Comanche, and the Sioux exerted their influence—often through violence—over other indigenous groupings. Indians (the Iroquois are a good early example) often exploited trade and alliance opportunities with Europeans to advance their

economic and security interests at the expense of other indigenes. Because they were different peoples, indigenes only belatedly developed pan-Indian consciousness and alliances and these typically succeeded only in achieving short-term gains rather than an effective long-term resistance against settler colonialism.

Over the past generation scholars tilling the fertile ground of borderlands studies have demolished the concept of static “frontier” in favor of fluid geographical boundaries. Regional and localized conflict and cooperation, drives and aspirations, multiethnic and gendered inclusions and exclusions forged a complex and diverse borderland history. Contravening a simple binary of expansion–resistance, the more recent studies have revealed places and times in which Euro-Americans and indigenes shared an ambivalent albeit often tenuous “middle ground.” Other local and regional studies have emphasized indigenous interaction and conflict, underscoring that whites often were not the central players on the various borderlands.⁶⁴

The rich historiography of borderland studies, with its emphasis on blurred boundaries, crossings, and connectivity, transcends traditional preoccupation with the nation-state and thus furthers the agenda of transnational history. Borderlands were by definition places where sovereignty, control over colonial space, was unstable and contested, hence the “centrality of violence in relations within and between borderland communities.” However, borderlands also represented sites for cultural interaction, hybridity, and negotiation as well as conflict. The regional and localized histories characteristic of borderlands studies stand on their own but can also, taken collectively, provide the evidentiary framework for contextualizing the history of North American settler colonialism. They also open up possibilities for linking Indian history with the wider global history of indigenous peoples in postcolonial context.⁶⁵

With much of the best work focused on the American southwest, borderlands’ scholarship has incorporated not only indigenes but also Hispanics more fully into histories formerly monopolized by Indians and whites. Borderland studies emphasize Hispanic and indigenous agency, sometimes in cooperation other times in conflict, and reveal myriad examples of ambivalence and ambiguity. As with Indians and Europeans, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were not merely subjects but instead had cultures and agency of their own. Violence between and among indigenes and Hispanics is one of the most significant products of the new borderland scholarship. Until recent years the traditional Turnerian frontier historiography focused overwhelmingly on violence between whites and Indians or whites and Hispanics. But as Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernandez points out, “Mexicans and Indians were not always resisting whites; they often allied with whites against other Indians and Mexicans.”⁶⁶

Indians and Hispanics waged brutally violent assaults and military campaigns. They also participated in captive taking, slave trading, and other odious practices traditionally ascribed to the colonizer alone. “Rituals of violence, exchange, and redemption” permeated borderland societies, James Brooks points out in his influential study of the colonial southwest. In these conflicts women and children became “crucial products of violent economic exchange” yet they also enriched the cultures with which they were forcibly conjoined. Violence, paradoxically, over