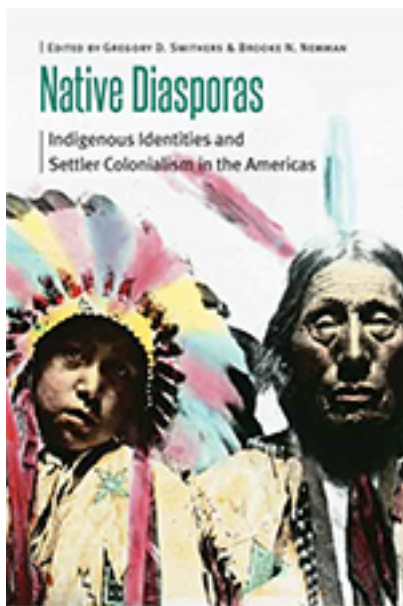


***Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas* edited by Gregory D. Smithers and Brooke N. Newman**

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Smithers, Gregory D., and Brooke Newman, eds. *Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 509 pp.; \$45.00 paper.



Native Diasporas is an ambitious and valuable scholarly compilation that predicated itself on the prefix “re-.” Gregory Smithers, Brook Newman, and the contributing authors re-visit the pre- and post-colonial contexts of Central, North, and South America, as well as the Caribbean and Pacific Islands, employing both historical and literary theories in order to re-think and re-interpret the multifaceted indigenous “layering of identity” (4). Smithers indicates that this work is a necessary step in removing the “simplistic descriptions” that imperial cultures have heretofore ascribed to indigenous communities in order to re-tell American history with Native voices (10).

The editors separate the book into three parts: adapting diasporic indigenous identities; native identity assertion in political, labor, and migratory contexts; and twentieth-century considerations on pan-Indian and indigenous identities. Part one vies for the indigenous integration of the social mores and political systems of early colonizing forces as an intentional action rather than passive victimization, in which an intricate “culturally constructed” definition of indigenous identity resisted the simplistic Western assertion of cultural dominance (112). Part two

advocates for the indigenous ingenuity that preserved native identities throughout the eras of governmental reservation and relocation treaties. In such cases, cultural memory and the spiritual ubiquity of ancestral lands safeguarded native cultures by emphasizing a dynamic “constant evaluation of meaning” of traditional practices (321). Part three centers primarily on the native body and performance of Indian-ness. Authors such as Kerri A. Inglis and Bill Anthes reveal the Western ambivalence surrounding the native body—an ambivalence that desires an Indian performance in order to enjoy an “imperialistic nostalgia” while criminalizing its inherent “inferiority” (430, 394).

The entire book takes a valuable, progressive stance on indigenous history, but there are certain contributions that stand out for recognition. James Taylor Carson’s essay “Mastering Language” is of particular value to ethno-linguistic scholars of both literature and history, as it enlightens connections between colonial tactics of subjugation via language. The author’s argument is partially a reiteration of Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s observations in “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes” (which are surprisingly not mentioned in the endnotes) on the power of language and race. But it is also an advancement of the study of slavery discourses, as it focuses on how the indigenous manipulation of Western sociopolitical language distinguished Native Americans as distinct from and superior to Blacks, consequently forcing the nineteenth-century American government to redefine identity based on the “indelibility of race” instead of the “mutability of culture” (227). Vera Parham’s “All Go to the Hop Fields” is a profound and productive commentary on the geospatial aspects of native culture. It provides the most useful and modern definition of indigenous identity over distance and credits Native Americans with shrewd “selective adaptation” methods of survival, implying that identity can be preserved through an “accretive” culture that mimics the migratory patterns of land travel (318, 321). Parham is also the closest to expounding upon and utilizing theories of cultural memory to further explicate the metaphoric importance of remembered places, as when she discusses the Puyallup and Spokane “creation of Native space” (334). Other authors, however, also touch on similar notions of cultural memory and the construction of identity, such as Rebecca Horne’s reference to Matthew D. O’Hara’s “locus of community memory,” Brooke N. Newman’s “culturally constructed sense of belonging,” Claudia B. Haake’s “memory of home,” and Daniel M. Cobb’s use of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (55, 112, 248, 444).

The book’s primary shortcoming is a lack of developed analysis of the role of cultural memory in identity formation and preservation. Utilizing developed theories of collective memory and cultural identity, like those of Jan Assmann, would have enriched the scope of the book and better tied the essays together. It would have also deepened the line of analysis into literary studies, particularly ecocritical approaches to indigenous literature. Axel Goodbody’s work on communities’ imaginative links to the symbology of landscape, for example, could have supplemented the analysis of Native American collective identity. Despite this oversight, it leaves fertile ground for further inquiry and interdisciplinary collaboration. Additionally, the index, as well as the authors’ bibliographies, provides ample support and a sufficient map of criticism in the respective fields.

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The book is an overall success in that it advances the historical representations of indigenous groups through iconoclastic rhetoric and analyses while remaining approachable for new readers entering the scholarly conversation. It is particularly valuable in its geographic and linguistic analyses, and it altogether revamps the traditional view of diaspora to include and legitimize diasporic groups who have remained on their ancestral land, offering an invaluable insight for transcultural studies.

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