Empire’s Haunted Logics

Comparative Colonialisms and the Challenges of Incorporating Indigeneity

DANIKA MEDAK-SALTZMAN

Indigenous peoples in Atlantic and Pacific new world geographies remain colonized as an ongoing lived experience that is not commensurable with the stories the postcolonial pluralistic multiculture wants to tell of itself.

—Jodi A. Byrd, The Transit of Empire

In no uncertain terms, Indigenous populations remain entrenched in fundamentally different situations than those faced by other racialized groups. Although the truth of it is inconvenient and unpalatable, the reality that settler colonialism—which Patrick Wolfe tells us is a process rather than an event—is ongoing makes it all the more conspicuous that the function and effects of settler colonialism remain largely unseen by those who benefit from them. Yet, as incisive as Jodi A. Byrd’s observation is, we must also recognize that the resistance to and failure to see Indigeneity, or the critical contexts central to understanding Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary experiences, is decidedly not limited to thinking from “new world geographies” nor to those who insist that our world is a “postcolonial pluralistic multiculture.” For these reasons, one might expect that the recent and increasingly common invocation of the term Indigeneity in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarly production would be a movement immediately welcomed by Indigenous studies scholars. However, inasmuch as such references to “Indigeneity” may be intended to help finally account for and draw attention to the way academics contribute to the pervasive vanishing and diminishment of Native presence, significance, and realities, these mentions remain largely, and troublingly, cursory. The invocation of Indigeneity across disciplines cannot yet be counted on as an indication of an author’s fluency with the legal, epistemological, and political particularities of Native peoples’ experiences with settler colonial realities—
which one might reasonably otherwise expect from scholarly engagement with intellectual subjects. Instead, this trend seems to be the most recent example of a familiar, and superficial, pattern of (non)engagement with Native peoples, histories, and Indigenous studies scholarship in settler colonial societies writ large. “Indigeneity” is all too often invoked as a term—rather than a concept—which reduces it to jargon, removes it from its vital context, and embeds it in writing that otherwise betrays a very limited intellectual and scholarly understanding of Native experiences, issues, and histories. This is to say (to borrow from Emma Perez’s Decolonial Imaginary) that Indigeneity is often invoked in a manner that renders it as merely an “appendage” to the real stories, which is markedly different from engaging it as a subject with its own goals. One can make arguments about why this has been the case: perceived paucity of sources (with its emphasis on a very specific and elite colonial print archive), lamentations and assumptions that “we will never know” (which justify not looking for what is there), and the difficulty of combating the already entrenched Indigenous absence in existing scholarship, among other oft-cited reasons. But such excuses normalize how power is exercised in the production of knowledge and how colonial ideologies have become enmeshed in certain (haunted) ways of thinking about the world.

This tendency cannot be blamed on the perceived “newness” of such interventions, for the practice and discipline of Indigenous studies has been building globally since the 1960s. To be clear, the argument here is not that everyone can or should become Indigenous studies experts. However, we would do well to recognize that when invocations of “Indigeneity” do not anticipate a complicated engagement with Native studies scholarship—even though the field represents half a century of scholarly engagement, theoretical interventions, and actual practice of Indigenous studies—it becomes difficult to see such usage as anything more than self-serving. As long as the superficial invocation of “Indigeneity” is intended to showcase that a scholar has kept up with scholarly trends in the field, rather than an attempt to critically engage with or further Indigenous studies scholarship in a meaningful way, then this tendency ought to be viewed as what it is: a twenty-first-century intellectual example of the time-honored Western tradition of pilfering (lands, resources, ideas, knowledge, theoretical frames, artistic traditions, etc.) from Native peoples for the benefit of the self/nation, with utter disregard to any resulting consequences borne by Indigenous peoples.

Yet how are we to engage with Indigeneity in a substantive manner when it has been sidelined or given cursory treatment in ethnic studies, in many
cases as often as it has been in other disciplines? For examples of this, we need look no further than ethnic studies, American studies, or race studies programs that do not include American Indian/Native American/Indigenous studies as part of their curriculum in any significant way. In doing so, instead of framing and engaging Indigenous studies, Indigenous experience, and Indigeneity as foundational and essential to critical examinations of North American experience, history, and racialization processes, the significance of Indigeneity has instead been undermined and relegated to the realm of the inconsequential: a prehistory or background to the real stories, relegated to the first/last week of class (or to Native history month), and absent from discussions of the civil rights era and contemporary sociopolitical protests in North America, to name but a few examples. A critical ethnic studies must do better than simply adding “and Indians/Native peoples/Indigeneity” to their teaching or writing as a means of performing inclusivity.

There are untold ways that a rigorous incorporation of Indigeneity and Indigenous studies scholarship can strengthen critical ethnic studies and cognate fields, and nuance existing scholarly understandings and conversations by insisting that long-held unquestioned assumptions be reevaluated: as an example, what does it mean to consider the Sand Creek Massacre and the Civil War as different strategic arms reaching toward the same national and economic goals,5 or to complicate narratives about slavery in North America by recognizing that not only did some Native communities participate in enslaving African peoples, but Native American peoples had also been enslaved and sold across the Atlantic and elsewhere?6 Critical intellectual engagement with Indigeneity is not about asserting a front-runner status in an “oppression Olympics”—a framing that often serves to silence the concerns of all other groups by asserting one group’s experience was the worst of all—rather, it is to acknowledge that including Indigeneity in inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship and collaborations can help us move closer to and beyond the stated objectives of a critical ethnic studies.7 Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho explain the inherent value in strengthening and undertaking inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship when they write that it “can generate potentially transformative methodologies of knowledge production.”8

To underscore how engaging Indigeneity in a more complex manner is vital to the success and development of critical ethnic studies in particular and to comparative scholarship more broadly, this article first draws attention to how theories and methods with useful applications in the examination of the experiences of other racialized peoples often fails to
achieve the same result when applied indiscriminately to Indigenous contexts. To underscore this, I engage with two familiar concepts—postcolonial haunting and conventions of periodization—to highlight how and why these frames must be reconfigured, or challenged and expanded, if they are to actually incorporate Indigenous peoples and experiences. I also offer one such re-visioning by presenting a new theory of haunting—one more applicable to Indigenous experience—as a step toward the development of new theoretical lenses that critical ethnic and Indigenous studies must continue to cultivate in order to foster an engagement with the unique situations of Indigenous peoples, separately and in concert with the experiences of other racialized groups in North America. Opening such theoretical spaces may allow us to commit ourselves to expanding our thinking beyond the artifice and imposition of disciplinary boundaries, rid our work of problematic suppositions about Native peoples, and challenge ourselves to examine how easily we can, and do, vanish Indigeneity in our scholarship. Further, and as an exercise in working toward and delineating what these “transformative methodologies” might look like, I then offer a reading of an 1860s U.S. political cartoon—which on the surface seems to have little, if anything, to do with Indigeneity, especially since it references Japan’s inaugural visit to the United States—to help underscore what becomes visible when images and ideas are reevaluated and freed from the haunted logics of empire.

ON HAUNTOLOGY AND PERIODIZATION

Theories of postcolonial haunting and the trace—although recuperative and valuable to analyzing the experiences and complexities of histories faced by other minoritized groups in North America—provide a perfect example of how the application and utility of popular theoretical frames for examining the experiences of marginalized groups, even in a strictly U.S. context, often does not work when simply extended to the situations faced by Indigenous populations. We cannot simply expect that theoretical frames that are useful in making sense of the experiences of other racialized groups will be equally relevant when applied to Indigenous peoples and contexts. Surely there are cases where this wholesale application works, but it is far more common to see such “inclusion” of Indigeneity as more of an attempt to fit an Indigenous round peg into an all-other-racialized-groups square hole, while avoiding actual engagement with how and why the Indigenous case complicates such theoretical frames. However, the desire to “make” a given theoretical frame “fit” rather than to engage with Indigeneity and all of its
attendant complexities represents a settler colonial desire that functions to render the value of, and need for, complex engagement with Indigenous difference inconsequential and irrelevant. This is a line of thinking that relies on the false assumption that Native peoples are simply another minority group in North America—a belief that is not only inaccurate but also serves to blind non-Native peoples to how their presence (even as minoritized groups) on stolen Indigenous territories makes a delicate and complex engagement with questions about collective complicity in the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples necessary. For this is a complicity that a reckoning with the very fact of that theft, and working toward manifesting the decolonial goals outlined by Indigenous communities and our allies, might go a long way toward addressing.

It seems that due, at least in part, to the general recognition of the shameful history of slavery in the United States—a basic level of visibility denied to Native peoples—it has become possible for scholars, historians, and novelists, among others, to employ ghosts and haunting as theoretically compelling and socially empowering tools for historical examination. From Ralph Ellison’s illustration of how that which is hypervisible is also an invisible ghostly presence in *Invisible Man* to Toni Morrison’s haunted Sethe, who comes face-to-face with the ghost of the daughter she murdered to save her from slavery, this trope is used far beyond these celebrated literary examples, both within and far afield from African American studies. Yet the very nature of haunting has been useful precisely because, as Avery Gordon tells us, “to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects,” even when, or perhaps especially when, these social effects of the past are dismissed as irrelevant and ahistorical or attributed to bitterness that ought to be “gotten over.” Indeed, the notion of haunting, often appearing as immutable “traces,” has proven a useful device for many groups in North America as they have sought to reveal long-hidden and silenced histories. However, wholesale applications of postcolonial and cultural studies notions of haunting and the trace to the specificity of Native American and Indigenous peoples’ experiences presents a distinct problem: precisely because the “fact” of Native vanishing has become part of a “common-sense” belief that renders Indigenous peoples always already ghostly presences, postcolonial notions of haunting and the trace simply cannot serve as recuperative, or decolonial, strategies for Indigenous peoples. Instead, indiscriminate application of these theories to Indigenous contexts manages to reinforce, rather than dismantle, settler colonial logics that mandate, carry out, and insist upon Indigenous absence.
Indian ghosts have been and remain an indelible trope in North American narratives and national mythologies: we see Indigenous “absence” taught in schools, supported by media, and reinforced by statistics that encourage seeing Native peoples and contexts as unworthy of inclusion in studies because our populations are so small. Blaming this absence, neglect, and perceived statistical inconsequence on our small numbers—instead of recognizing the significance of teaching about, reporting on, and including populations that have been intentionally reduced to single-digit percentages of national populations (on our own lands)—shifts responsibility for this continued ignorance away from those who have benefited from settler colonialism and onto the shoulders of the victims and survivors of great violence and invasion. This orchestrated absence and insisted-upon irrelevance is also often unquestioningly reproduced in scholarship—even when the scholarly subject at hand seems to otherwise have little to nothing to do with Indigenous subjects. This pervasive, public, scholarly, and media-supported and encouraged manner of thinking about—or more tellingly not thinking about—Native peoples is part of the unseen fabric that binds settler colonial societies together, legitimating the presence of all non-Native peoples on stolen land, whether they arrived by choice or by force. For these reasons, any attempt to simply extend notions of postcolonial haunting to Native peoples is neither empowering nor generative; instead, it further entrenches settler colonial fantasies of Indigenous absence that operate to absolve non-Native peoples, living on stolen Native lands, of this original sin.

Therefore, in order to conceive of a theoretically compelling concept of haunting that can better illuminate Indigenous experiences, we must invert the familiar directionality of postcolonial haunting that locates the source of ghostly agency as emanating from the experiential realities of racialized subjects and situates haunting as a consequence of these complicated histories. Indeed, for any theory of haunting to be useful to Indigenous and allied efforts toward decolonization, Indigenous ghosts simply cannot be conceived of as the source of this haunting. Instead, the ghosts that emerge from and haunt settler colonial contexts radiate from their roots in the moral, intellectual, and legal logics developed to legitimate, as necessity, the great violence of empire. Settler colonial societies are haunted by the need to keep these unpalatable truths and their human consequences hidden. This is a feat the ghosts I am describing accomplish by maintaining and reinforcing foundational “truths” and assumptions (e.g., patently false beliefs that Native peoples had no sophisticated forms of governance before the arrival of Europeans) that aid in determining whether, and how, Indigeneity is
considered, if it is considered at all. Rendered another way, the logics of empire that haunt settler colonial societies are vestiges of the goals and spirit of colonialism that haunt in order to maintain the foundational narratives of Indigenous absence/inconsequence that justify settler colonial presence on Indigenous lands and manage to absolve guilty consciences in the process. I call these the “specters of colonialism,” and they are as pervasive as they are relentless as they work continually and nearly imperceptibly in their efforts to keep the violence, theft, and logics used to legitimate colonial endeavors neatly hidden from view.

Naming these haunted logics the specters of colonialism—a turn of phrase that conjures certain European ghosts of its own—as I call attention to the need to focus on, implement, and contribute to critical Indigenous and ethnic studies theory might seem an odd choice. But this continental intellectual genealogy offers a significant and worthwhile means of considering ghostliness and the nature of haunting and their application to Indigenous contexts. Rather than thinking of that which haunts as alternatively tangible, visible, or as spirits that can be sensed but not seen as they affect the living in a variety of ways, there is a less common, but more theoretically compelling, manner of thinking about haunting that can better lend itself to considerations of Indigenous experiences. That is, when what that which haunts is the very spirit of an idea: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s claim that a “specter of communism” was haunting Europe and Jacques Derrida’s discussions of the “specters of Marx” are prime examples of this kind of haunting.10 Adding to the challenges that arise when undertaking academic investigations of that which is both there-and-not-there is the fact that it is often difficult, and at times nearly impossible, to draw attention to that which haunts entire societies. This is precisely the point that Derrida is making regarding the specters of Marx when he coins the term hauntology; for the term itself in the original French is a homonym for ontology, literally replacing the study of existence with the study of that which does not exist yet wields considerable influence. These ghostly presences are deep seated and lingering, and they leave indelible traces of themselves that can be read—if we manage to free ourselves from the influence of these specters of colonialism, by learning to see them and resist their influence—to reveal seldom-considered perspectives on the past and present. While Marx and Engels reference ghosts of communism and Derrida the spirit of Marx and the Marxist inheritance, I assert that the specter haunting our world is our colonial inheritance made manifest. I locate the agents, ideologies, practices, and long-lasting effects of colonialism as the
sites from which these myriad hauntings emerge, and contend that we are all more influenced by them than we are likely aware. After all, as the specters of colonialism exert their influence in carrying out the goals of the spirit of colonialism, they hold sway over the weight with which Indigeneity and Indigenous concerns are respected, engaged with, and investigated at the same time that they encourage the dismissal of certain questions and the blind acceptance of settler colonial foundational logics. In this way, the specters of colonialism help to justify and promote the very pattern of non-engagement with Indigenous intellectual traditions and Indigenous studies scholarship that this article seeks to trouble.

STATISTICAL IRRELEVANCE, THE ARTIFICE OF BOUNDED TIME, AND COLONIAL OPTICS

There are two key examples of the normalized ways that Native peoples are excluded from scholarship, even in critical ethnic studies, that might serve as a starting point in any endeavor to disrupt the haunted logics of empire. The first is the level of legitimacy given to claims that Native populations are so small that we are “statistically irrelevant” often offered up to explain away or justify why one has neglected (or refused) to include Native peoples in their data and analysis. Yes, we are a very small population on our own lands, thanks to the violence of settler colonialism, but erasure, by any other name, or means, or justification, is still erasure. The second example can begin to be tackled by reframing and reconfiguring how we conceptualize traditional fields and historical periods, what they mean, and why this matters. For embedded within standardized understandings of historical periods are assumptions about the past that the specters of colonialism are invested in maintaining, and these are precisely the assumptions that a critical ethnic studies ought to be invested in disrupting. For example, thanks to the way that academic disciplines have been siloed and how time has been demarcated into specific and bounded historical periods, the specters of colonialism have been able to render the fact and consequences of settler colonialism invisible by making it arduous to work across disciplinary and temporal boundaries in attempts to call attention to subjects other than those privileged by conventional periodization. Here, I shift attention to my larger work examining the relationships between the United States and Japan and the intertwining of their settler colonial projects in the 1870s as an example of how periodization can function to determine which lines of inquiry are considered historically possible. This
point of inquiry immediately complicates the way that scholars have long marked the Japanese colonial period as beginning with Japan’s takeover of Taiwan in 1895, and simultaneously suggests that Japan was engaging in its own settler colonial projects—two claims considered controversial in Japanese studies. A cemented 1895 “start date” for the Japanese colonial period makes it nearly impossible to argue that Japanese colonialism occurred prior to this, despite the fact that there is ample evidence that Japan’s takeover of Indigenous peoples’ territories—Ainu lands in the north and Ryukyu lands in the south—was indeed a settler colonial endeavor being undertaken well before Japan asserted authority over Taiwan, and the Indigenous populations therein. Yet use of this periodization and acceptance of its attendant haunted implications remains common in Japanese studies and history, as does the trend of referring to Japan’s takeover of Ainu territories, in particular, as an exercise of “domestic development,” even as some in the discipline question both this language usage and the limits imposed by hard and fast notions of historical periods.11 Although attempts have been made to dismiss these concerns as “semantics,” we would do well to recognize how resistance to renaming national activities “colonial” or “settler colonial” (to be more accurate) and questioning or rebounding given time periods (to make visible the significant events that take place across conventional historical periods) are themselves products and evidence of the influence levied by the specters of colonialism.

Similar concerns exist regarding the legitimacy of disciplines beyond Japanese studies, such as Indigenous studies or anthropology, having purview over Ainu subjects. One point of contention for those who want to stake a proprietary claim to Ainu subjects has to do with concerns about Japanese language proficiency. To be sure, it has been, and remains, vital that those engaged in the production of knowledge about Japanese studies subject areas, including Ainu subjects, engage Japanese-language source materials and scholarship proficiently. To these ends, scholars within Japanese studies have taken responsibility for academic gatekeeping, as a matter of principle and intellectual integrity. This vigilance, however, only serves to make it more remarkable that many of these same scholars engage in studies of Ainu subjects without any working level of fluency in Indigenous studies scholarship, which would unquestionably help nuance and inform their scholarship in critical ways. This practice means that even the best-intentioned scholars often end up producing work that is interventionist in their own discipline by beginning conversations that Indigenous studies has had resolved for decades. Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS),
as the field is increasingly known, is a rigorous endeavor that incorporates a vast array of traditional disciplinary vantage points and areas of inquiry, and is understood to have unique goals outside of narrowly focused investigations of Native relationships with settler colonial nation states. However, the same cannot yet be said for the Ainu case, and so long as investigating Ainu subjects remains the domain of a Japanese studies that is not in conversation with NAIS, it may be tethered to and limited by this constraint for some time to come. It is this chasm—existing among those working on Indigenous peoples (in other disciplines), those striving to simply include “and Indigeneity” (to broaden their perceived comparative scope, sans nuanced engagement), and those working in Indigenous studies—that must be overcome if we aim to produce scholarship that is no longer haunted by the goals, assumptions, and logics of empire.

To illustrate this, I now turn to an image from 1860 that foregrounds a peculiar organizing optics of colonialism, a visual regime that is similar to those that arise across incidences marked by empire and power imbalances. These colonial optics organize how, if, and for what purpose Indigeneity is seen. Examined with this in mind, the weight of Native presence on lands coveted for U.S. and Japanese nation-building projects of the mid-nineteenth century becomes more readily evident, whether the Indigenous figure is deployed or obscured as these expansionist national projects are carried out, envisioned, and depicted. Seeing hypervisibility and invisibility as being opposite sides of the same coin frequently spent in the service of systems of domination is a strategy I borrow from black cultural studies. As Nicole R. Fleetwood claims in Troubling Vision, if visibility “implies a state of being able to be seen,” then, by logical extension, invisibility implies a state of not being able to be seen. Hypervisibility, however, does not simply mean ever-present visibility. Rather, the concept of hypervisibility has been developed as an interventionist term for describing the overproduction of visual material that portrays Others in manners that have been so overdetermined and so ever-present that they become little consequence, thereby rendering that which is hypervisible nearly, or effectively, invisible. Put another way, the overrepresentation of an Othered group can either, or simultaneously, represent, reproduce, and further entrench social and political invisibility for particular populations, effectively disappearing these groups almost entirely from the landscape of hegemonic discourse. Approached this way then, even an image that does not overtly represent Indigenous peoples can be read in a manner that exposes how this same image erases Indigenous experiences of, and existence during, these same historical moments. Thus,
in order to tease out Indigeneity and Indigenous experiences from the tangled strands of intertwined histories, we must not only recognize the way that the haunted logics of empire are working to prevent us from doing so, but—and even if we have only been exposed to thinking that focuses on how the colonizers influence the colonized—we must also honor that historical influences levied on local and global events have always run both ways and ought to have disciplinary implications.

OUR VISITORS

On June 2, 1860, a political cartoon titled “Our Visitors” appeared in Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization, a popular news, political, and literary magazine first published in 1857. At the same time that Harper’s Weekly provided news about local, national, and international happenings for its readers, the publication’s stories and images often introduced and reinforced commonly held U.S. beliefs about cultural others by intimately and often visually intertwining race-based ideologies with national fantasies of a uniquely American divine providence. The ubiquity of such images during this publication’s formative years, and across the news media of the time, played integral roles in carrying out the operations of empire and in justifying and legitimizing settler colonial nation-building projects. With this in mind, my close reading of “Our Visitors” is aimed at considering what the image was crafted to convey to its intended 1860s audience, alongside what a twenty-first-century vantage point makes visible regarding the future that this image anticipates. Moreover, this reading is offered as an example of how we can begin to call the haunted logics of empire into question, recognize the power in seeing the unseen, and begin to free ourselves, and the scholarship we produce, from the influence of the specters of colonialism.

“Our Visitors” presents the viewer with two contrasting figures, one comfortably seated in his own home and positioned slightly right of center, and the other, a visitor to this home who is entering from the left. The text below the image identifies the home’s occupant as Brother Jonathan, an early version of the character who would become Uncle Sam, and one an 1860s audience would have been able to recognize even without his usual stovepipe hat, given his standard attire: striped pants and a black coat worn over a vest covered in stars. The other man is a be-slippered, sword-carrying, dark-completed man, entering Jonathan’s home from the left, and carrying an unlit candle in a holder upon which “Japan” is written. This guiding text on the candleholder is reinforced by the text below the image that identifies
Courtesy HarpWeek.
this man simply as a “Japanese Visitor.” Naming him this way, instead of simply relying on the character’s clothing (kimono, obi, and hakama) and hairstyle, ensured that the audience, who were only just becoming acquainted with the visual cues of “Japaneseness,” recognized this man as representing the nation of Japan. Harper’s audience was familiar with political cartoons using particular characters to portray specific nations (such as Brother Jonathan, and his British counterpart John Bull), and by 1860, its readers were also well aware of the visual signifiers of racial difference that had already become fixed in media portrayals of black, Chinese, Native, Irish, and other others who were often portrayed in political cartoons. After more than two hundred years of restricting travel to, trade with, and diplomatic relations with Western countries, Japan “opened,” first, to the United States in the 1850s. For this reason, representations of Japaneseness were still unfamiliar to U.S. audiences. However, the arrival of the inaugural Japanese Embassy in 1860 made it vital for the media to document and comment on the arrival and experiences of these Japanese visitors, thus artists often relied on elements and signifiers usually associated with other races. In this case, we can see this in the artist’s rendering of footwear (slippers rather than geta) and the overly pronounced angular shape of the eyes as well as in the man’s darkened skin tone and the fullness of his lips—familiar markers of Chineseness and blackness, respectively. The clothing, body language, and markers of race and nationality that the characters display work to visually manifest existing 1860s ideas about race, racial hierarchy, and narratives of national uniqueness central to a reading of this image.

The entire scene depicted in “Our Visitors” is set in the heart of an 1860s U.S. living room replete with hallmarks of modernity and success, the centerpiece of which is a lamp labeled “civilization.” To the right of this literal and figurative center, we see Jonathan, who only moments before had been in the midst of reading an issue of Harper’s Weekly. In stark contrast with how comfortable Jonathan seems, surrounded by the hallmarks of civilization, the Japanese man is portrayed as if he is emerging from darkness as he enters the room and extends his candle toward the “light of civilization.” Jonathan looks up from his paper to see this visitor entering the room and looking intently at Jonathan. In response, and with one eyebrow raised inquisitively, Jonathan looks at his visitor and says, “Ah! And, pray, what can I do for you?” Jonathan’s sly smile, as he makes this inquiry, suggests that he already has an inkling regarding what might be of interest to his visitor. This reading of Jonathan’s expression as he queries his visitor is reinforced by the conspicuousness of Japan’s unlit candle being extended toward the
light of civilization for lighting. Moreover, this suggestion that Japan might need the United States to "do" this for them is also reflective of popular perceptions of Japan, which were rooted in part in U.S. officials' descriptions of Japan as a "semi-barbarous" nation, and thus in need of assistance in modernizing. In response to this, the Japanese visitor says, "If you please, I would like to borrow a little of your light." In this way, the image frames the United States and its citizens (represented by Jonathan) as bearers, brokers, and beneficiaries of civilization, while Japan is rendered as merely interested in being supplied with these skills.

“Our Visitors” mirrors the anxieties and excitement that had been building among the populace since President Millard Fillmore sent a U.S. fleet led by Commodore Matthew Perry that departed in 1852 intending to “open” Japan—a feat other Western nations had previously attempted, to no avail. The “visitor” that this image represents was the first official Japanese visit to a Western nation since Perry’s success inaugurating U.S.-Japan relations. Many saw Japan’s decision to send an embassy to the United States, before sending one to other Western nations, as a coup—attributable to the divine providence and manifest destiny of the United States—despite the matter of geographic proximity and Japan’s goal of quickly learning about the West that surely held sway over Japan’s decision.

Evidence of the United States’ belief in its own manifest destiny can be seen in the fixtures around the room that represent the era’s national social, economic, racial, and technological progress. To draw attention to the relationship between the light of civilization at the image’s center and the gas chandelier, the artist provides a visual link, a gas line, that extends between them indicating that it is the same civilizing fuel that makes it possible to illuminate this room and the cultural and material signifiers of progress in the room. Rather than relying on the audience’s ability to infer from the image that this shared power source represents an important linkage, the artist affixes each light with guiding text—the lamp with "civilization,” and the shades inscribed “literature,” “art,” and “commerce”—that works in concert with the illustration to link technological advances with these civilized, and civilizing, arts. References to literature, art, and commerce—the very hallmarks of civilization—are evident throughout the room. Literature, and by extension literateness, for example, are represented in two ways in “Our Visitors.” The first is in the fact that Jonathan is reading an issue of Harper’s Weekly, a detail that links Jonathan (representing the United States) and the Harper’s readers together as they simultaneously participate in literate (and therefore civilized) society. This mirroring encourages the readers to
see themselves reflected in this image and thus as a part of the larger whole (U.S. civilized society) that Jonathan represents. In this way, the image reflects back at the readers that they too, in reading Harper’s Weekly, are in the midst of using a specific “civilized” skill that binds them to an imagined collective of other nineteenth-century Harper’s Weekly readers.

As Benedict Anderson argues in Imagined Communities, print capitalism, the printing press, and the resulting ability to distribute reading and visual material to people across significant distances provided individuals with the opportunity to cultivate a sense of self as part of a larger (national) whole. As Anderson explains, imagined communities are comprised of people who, it can be assumed, will never meet yet who hold certain values, histories, and approaches to life, collectively, in common. Moreover, Anderson argues that the development and proliferation of broadly configured socially imagined communities played an essential role in larger projects of nation-building and nation-state formation in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

While Imagined Communities is considered foundational scholarship that has been valuable across many disciplines—and is particularly useful in examining this aspect of “Our Visitors”—the fact that Anderson’s articulation of imagined community formation is predicated on, and intimately linked to, the written word and the printing press has led some to approach it with suspicion. After all, Anderson’s privileging of the printed word, over other equally significant and reliable manners of documentation—an assertion that insists that the presence of certain products of the (Western) industrial revolution were vital precursors to the development of imagined communities and the concept of nation—is deeply problematic. Such an assertion implicitly inds many non-Western communities, and those whose documentation of history and narrative have long taken place in forms that are not “written”—in the sense Anderson implies—as being, therefore, unable, if not culturally or intellectually incapable, of forming nations of imagined communities. That Anderson’s work is embedded with biases and myopia rooted in “civ/sav” binary logics makes using it without challenging this bias questionable, particularly when Anderson is being referenced in an essay that examines how the specters of colonialism continue to haunt academic production and consumption. To my mind, using Anderson without considering and acknowledging the implicit and deeply rooted biases that his work reinforces—unintentionally perhaps, but nevertheless—is one of the many ways that the specters of colonialism continue as active presences in contemporary scholarship. That being said, the tableau
presented in "Our Visitors" was indeed made widely available thanks to the printing press, and Jonathan's mirroring of Harper's readers serves to strengthen the viewer's sense of belonging to the specific imagined community that Jonathan represents.

Under the lamp and bathed in the light of civilization lays the second reference to the written word, perhaps even The Word. Although it is difficult to discern in the original, and even more so once reduced for publication here, the letters I-B-L-E are just barely visible along the spine of this book. Although we cannot know whether the original audience had difficulty making out the title of this book, the inclusion of the Bible, and therefore Christianity, in this tableau does more than mark both the home (read as the civilized world) and Brother Jonathan (read as the United States) as Christian. The placement of the Bible at the center of the scene also invites a contemporary audience to weigh the role and complicity of Christianity in the violence and spread of empire in the name of "civilization."

Indeed, by the time of the European "Age of Discovery," a euphemistic term that describes a period marked by unprecedented theft, slaughter, and subjugation of non-Christian peoples and lands, Christianity had already long been used to justify actions that were antithetical to the principles of the faith. There are three papal bulls from this period that dictated the rules of the age and lent an air of righteousness to claims that all Christians were civilized and all non-Christians were savage.¹⁶ These documents declared that the lands, resources, bodies, and labor of non-Christian peoples (that had not already been "discovered" and claimed by another Christian nation) could be claimed, by "Right of Discovery," for the Christian nation "discovering" it; these religious proclamations further specified that, according to what would be called the Law of Nations, lands already claimed by one Christian nation could not be claimed by another Christian nation. A fact little known outside of Native studies is that this same "right of discovery" was written into U.S. law in 1823 by Chief Justice John Marshall in Johnson v. M'Intosh, the first in the trilogy of laws that remain the foundation of Federal Indian Law. In opposition with the U.S. goal to preserve the separation of Church and State, Federal Indian Law and the U.S. Supreme Court still rely on the intimate intertwining of Christian doctrine and jurisprudence codified as precedent by Marshall, who sought to justify European claims to North American lands while still recognizing (and limiting) American Indian sovereignty and did so by ultimately declaring Native tribes "domestic dependent nations." Importantly, the fact that the mores of Christianity and the violent actions undertaken in the name of civilization
were fundamentally at odds was not lost on Native peoples; treaty commissioners, Indian agents, and others often commented on this “troubling” fact, even asking to be replaced since they had lost any moral credibility with the tribes as a result. But confronting the illogical and unjust behavior undertaken in the name of Christianity and its civilizing mission did little, in most cases, to slow the dispossession, colonization, death, and forced assimilation inflicted on Native peoples by the newcomers.

By inscribing “literature” and “art” on separate chandelier shades, the image encourages a reader to consider these discrete elements of civilized cultural production and to see how art is represented around the room. Ranging from the detail and design of the artistic metal work on the lamp and chandelier to the more obvious framed paintings on the walls, art is also represented in several ways in this room. The presence of these decorative elements, already imbued with weight by the guiding text that marks art as important, lend themselves to a reading that sees the attainment of civilization and the spoils acquired in conquest as part and parcel of developing both an appreciation for art and the accumulation of wealth necessary for art acquisition.

Facing the viewer and partially obscured by the smoke from Brother Jonathan’s cigar is a painting of a large, seafaring vessel. It is unclear whether this painting was intended to conjure a particular voyage, a famous ship, or a particular moment in history in the minds of the audience. What we do know is that by including a painted ship as a part of this tableau, intended to mark the United States as a home of Western civilization, the artist demonstrated how ships were vital to U.S. commerce and economy in 1860 in a general sense, and this image also likely reminded readers in particular of the groundbreaking trips that Commodore Perry took to Japan in 1853–54. Whether the intended audience saw Perry’s success or a gesture to maritime economic endeavors in the painting behind Brother Jonathan’s head, the painted ship is not the only way “commerce” is represented in the room. A miniature steam locomotive sits atop the mantel on the far right of the room, reminding the 1860s audience that the railroad made it increasingly possible to spread progress westward and travel great distances at ever-increasing rates. Although completion of the transcontinental railroad would not occur for nearly another decade, the desire to have the railroad link the United States from sea to shining sea was already a familiar national goal. At this time, most major cities in the northern and midwestern states were connected by rail, and it was not uncommon for people and news reports alike to mention all that the railway had made possible, and to imagine
what a transcontinental railway might bring in the future. Thus, the model train above the fireplace reminded the reader about the ingenuity, industry, modernity, and general character of the nation. However, we must remember that pervasive narratives of the American West and the spread of railways that focus on the technologies or the racialized labor that made such expansion possible yet fail to incorporate the experiences of Indigenous peoples and their extensive resistance efforts are always already haunted by the specters of colonialism.

Of course the creator of “Our Visitors” could not have known how future events would unfold, but by capturing a particular logic of empire that sees the United States as the beating heart of civilization charged with carrying this light outward to illuminate the darkest corners of the savage world. This image represents nineteenth-century narratives, rooted in the linearity of progress that fixes whole peoples as either the purveyors or victims of civilizing endeavors. It is precisely these binary logics that cement understandings of the directionality of influence as flowing only from colonizer to colonized, a framing that Indigenous studies aims to complicate. For example, when the verbal exchange between Jonathan and the Japanese visitor is considered from an Indigenous studies vantage point, one sees in the visitor’s request, “to borrow a little” of Jonathan’s “light,” more than a passing reference to the information-gathering elements of Japan’s early missions to the States. To be sure, the 1860s embassy and the Iwakura mission that followed, in 1871, sought to learn from and about the Western world, but the overdetermined flow of influence and the artifice of conventional historical periodization virtually prescribes a reading that renders Japan’s interest in learning these ways as part of national efforts to modernize/Westernize quickly. However, this is a narrative that neatly overwrites a more complicated history where the United States advises Japan in its settler colonial nation-building endeavor into the resource-rich lands of the northern island of Hokkaidō—home of the Indigenous Ainu peoples. This history, which seems to be anticipated in Japan’s request to “borrow a little” of the United States’ light, is one that is still hotly contested in Japan, and Japanese studies, where investments in seeing such undertakings as “domestic” development run deep. Rather than seeing the events that unfolded and the past they call upon as the result of a “natural” and predestined progression or “development,” we would be better served by considering them the foreseeable consequences of actions undertaken in the name of nineteenth-century imperial ideologies, modernization, and keeping pace with the West. Maintaining the illusion that settler colonial national successes are not
rooted in theft—of Indigenous lands, lives, labor, and resources—requires the active participation of national/international populations in erasing the significance of Indigeneity, the fact of continued Indigenous existence, and the consequences of settler colonialism that continue to be borne by Indigenous communities globally. Insisting on the inconsequence of Indigenous presence and absence (e.g., from citing statistical irrelevance in order to legitimate not collecting or including data about Indigenous peoples, to assertions that there are no more “real” [insert name of existing Indigenous peoples here]) presents itself in a variety of seemingly innocuous ways in settler societies, and any interrogation into how we contribute to the continual vanishing of Native peoples and concerns must begin by addressing this fact.

CONCLUSION

I hope that this article has, at least in some small way, managed to shed light into the shadows where the specters of colonialism work to prevent scholars and lay people alike from seeing or grappling with hidden narratives of the past. For the specters of colonialism work to ensure that historical events are so thoroughly overwritten that the possibility of other narratives emerging has been all but foreclosed—be they by the perceived inevitability and naturalness of Indigenous disappearance, by lamentations that we will never know (justified by claims that documentation does not exist, even when archives can be read in a way that sees beyond the haunted logics of empire to reveal some of the histories that others insist do not exist), or by taking colonial conjecture as embedded in the archives at face value.17

Each of the hallmarks of settler colonial success represented in “Our Visitors” is predicated on, and only possible because of, the theft, slaughter, and great violence done to Indigenous peoples. This is a great violence that is perpetuated by our failure to critically account for and engage with Indigeneity, Indigenous presence, and orchestrated Indigenous “absence” in our scholarly work. For when we participate in the vanishing of Indigenous peoples by undermining Native political concerns, by dismissing Native land and resource claims, and by employing tactics to help us to avoid reckoning with what our own complicity in the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples might mean and bring to the discipline, we are writing on the side of white supremacy.

Ethnic studies scholars and the scholarship we produce are not immune to the influence of the specters of colonialism. Working on ethnic studies subjects and engaging in critical ethnic studies critique alone is not enough
to exorcise these haunted logics of empire from where they lay embedded in the colonized landscapes of academic inquiry. However, by working to recognize some of the normalized ways that the specters of colonialism hold sway over our decisions to include Native peoples and experiences, or the way they aid attempts to legitimate our failure to include them, we can begin to remove ourselves, and our scholarship, from their spheres of influence. While there have been efforts to critically think through the disciplinary, theoretical, and political implications of Indigeneity in ethnic studies (as signaled by the “critical” in critical ethnic studies), it has yet to be seen if these efforts would be fleeting or sustained. By working to dispel the power that the specters of colonialism wield, and interrogating the haunted logics of empire, we may succeed in rendering visible the multitude of ways that haunted knowledge about Indigenous peoples is embedded in archives, reinforced in educational systems, and—unless we take action—reproduced in our scholarship.


NOTES

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3. I use “appendage” in an analogous way to how Emma Perez frames conventional inclusion of women’s histories in The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 12.

4. We must treat the failure to incorporate Indigeneity in a sophisticated way as inexcusable, and see doing so as akin to broadcasting one’s complicity in furthering settler colonial ideologies that mandate Indigenous disappearance and insist upon the inconsequence of Indigeneity. See Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism,” Social Justice 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–43.

5. As Ari Kelman has argued in A Misplaced Massacre (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), as Mark Rifkin explored in the second issue (Fall 2014) of NAIS, the journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association,


7. While it is beyond the scope of this article, Jared Sexton’s “The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign” (Critical Sociology [December 2014]: 1–15) provides an excellent example of using a limited understanding of critical Indigenous studies as a whole (in this case through a consideration of one narrow strand of theorizing) to make sweeping claims about the discipline itself—in this case in attempts to levy a charge of complicity with antiblackness. Doing so serves to eclipse (for a Native studies audience, anyway) what valid points he may have and also appears to rank and subordinate histories of suffering. Ultimately this piece seems to reproduce what it intends to critique—namely, that strains of exceptionalism inform both settler colonial critique and antiblackness. For a more comprehensive engagement with this latter sentiment, see Ilyko Day’s article “Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique” in this issue.


13. During its period of seclusion, Japan only allowed restricted trade relationships with the Dutch East India Company in Nagasaki.


16. The three papal bulls are *Dum Diversas* of June 18, 1452, and *Romanus Pontifex* of January 8, 1455, both issued by Pope Nicholas V, and the *Inter Caetera* issued on May 4, 1493, by Pope Alexander VI.