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BOOK REVIEW

## **American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment**

by Jason Edward Black, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2015, 228 pp., \$65.00 (cloth)

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With the recent inflection in rhetorical scholarship on theorizing citizenship, Jason Edward Black's *American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment* is a timely reminder that the early formation of U.S. civic identity was predicated on the erasure of indigenous sovereignty, culture, and identity. Black's project also disabuses readers of the historical misconception that this erasure was a unidirectional process wherein indigenous peoples ultimately succumbed to the onslaught of Western colonization. Instead, Black begins with the assumption that U.S. public culture is, in part, the outcome of a dialectical struggle between Euro-Americans and American Indians over the meaning of land, sovereignty, and national identity. By critically analyzing the voices of American Indian resistance to colonization throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Black illustrates how American Indian nations indicted the master narratives of U.S. nationalism by pointing to the fissures and contradictions in the concept of national belonging. Evinced the rhetorical agency of American Indians throughout the uneven and haphazard process of colonization, *Removal and Allotment* demonstrates that American public culture is invariably shaped, and sometimes thwarted, by those it subjugated. This project illustrates the kind of insights garnered from decolonial methodologies, where the rhetorical critic operates with skepticism toward official discourse and Western knowledge production, presuming that there is an epistemic advantage to be gained by heeding the voices of those who are subjugated

by colonialism. The result is a project that shows the complexities of indigenous agency and identity throughout resistance to Euro-American colonization.

*Removal and Allotment* begins with a relatively simple but fundamentally important premise: American Indian-Euro-American relations are not, and never have been, unidirectional. Black explains that his sojourn into the archives of colonialism and resistance is designed to demonstrate that “Native voices held the possibility of challenging and threatening those in authority” (4). In the introduction, Black explains that the purpose of his project is to explore the dynamics of Native rhetorical agency throughout the key periods of U.S. territorial expansion in the nineteenth century. Black justifies his selection of period and texts by foregrounding the importance of paying particular attention to moments where Euro-American dominance was presumed to be total and, consequently, where scholars have overlooked the quality of Native decolonization rhetoric. Black contends that Native resistance rhetoric not only slowed and frustrated colonization but also contributed to U.S. public culture by shaping the texture of national identity.

Black introduces a framework for interpreting the discourses of removal and allotment (1830–1934) that privileges the voices of the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, Seminoles, and others who resisted colonialism and territorial expansion throughout the nineteenth century. Black indicts the notion that American Indians were voiceless and helpless—a mistake made by those who characterize U.S. colonialism as totalizing and uniform. Instead of privileging the official discourse of the colonial archive, footnoting what some have characterized as protestors’ “mere response” to colonialism, Black reads exchanges between Native Americans and White policy makers as “participatory,” “interactive,” and “hybrid” as opposed to unidirectional colonial discourse in which power was wielded against the subjugated. Black’s extensive archival work gives primacy to the decolonization rhetoric of Pushmataha, Chief John Ross, Black Hawk, Standing Bear, among many others. Although Black’s work carefully details the justifications for colonialism in government discourses, he attends to vernacular discourses, the discourses of oppressed communities that exist outside the official colonial archive. Black’s work also recasts the formation of American national identity as *hybrid*, in the sense that the oppressed exercised agency and shaped the formation of public culture through exchange. Black’s book also shows the benefits of critics adopting an anticolonial framework toward Native texts. That is, these texts cannot be understood outside of the material and symbolic processes of colonialism in the U.S. He contends that resistance must be at the forefront of the analysis: “when examining Native rhetoric, a presentation of resistance can unmask governmental cycles of abuse concerning indigenous cultures and can challenge the ways that this relationship has functioned over time” (11). Black also advocates for “radical indigenism,” an approach that “celebrates how [American Indians] have *acted* by maneuvering to possess economic modalities, sovereignty, safety, and other subsistent needs of the human experience” (12).

Next, Black introduces the theory of *détournement* to show how Native resistance rhetoric worked within government discourse to decolonize the rhetoric of allotment and removal. Reviving a lesser-known theoretical apparatus of resistance discussed in the works of Guy Debord and Greil Marcus, among others, Black expands upon the subversive power of using oppressive language against itself and how Native resistance rhetoric exposed the

duplicity in benevolent rhetorics of removal and allotment. Black's emphasis on *détournement* refracts new elements in Native resistance to removal and allotment by showing how the rhetoric of colonialism can be repurposed "to drain the original language of its oppressive assaults in the service of propping up the disempowered" (12). Black gives critics a way of identifying rhetorical maneuvers that might, at first glance, appear to be conciliatory but fundamentally subvert the logics of colonialism in mainstream policy discourse.

The book is organized around the dialectical struggle over U.S. colonialism wherein one chapter details the contradictions and fissures in governmental rhetoric, which is then followed by a chapter analyzing how American Indians appropriated and dismantled the justifications for colonialism. For example, chapter one establishes how early engagements and conflicts between Native people, White settlers, old colonial powers, and a newly forged American republic established the framework for the advanced and systematic colonization that took place under the auspices of removal and allotment. Chapter two emphasizes the importance of the rhetoric of President Andrew Jackson, namely how his administration rhetorically transformed Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer civic ideal into a conquering pioneer. Black also argues that race and ethnicity became reified as important criteria for citizenship throughout the Congressional debate over removal as well as the clashes between the states and the federal government, the Marshall Court and the executive, over who controlled the right to decide the fate of Indian nations. In these introductory chapters, Black establishes the rhetorical frameworks that Jackson and other removal proponents used so that the reader can better understand how American Indians cleverly worked within and against colonial discourse.

Hence, in chapter three, Black reveals how the five southeastern nations challenged the rhetorical frameworks for justifying removal: including rhetoric of expansion, citizenship, territoriality, paternalism, sectionalism, and godliness. Black shows how Native rhetors discovered fissures, contradictions, and inconsistencies in governmental discourse and exploited them as rationales for Native sovereignty. Native rhetors successfully worked through the factionalism of American politics, the split between Jackson and states' rights advocates as well as pro- and anti-removal politicians to delay the implementation of removal. He identifies the rhetorical venues by which American Indians reached Congress: speeches, newspapers, petitions, and treaties. Each venue had a unique rhetorical effect. For instance, the petition allowed the southeast nations to directly address the House of Representatives while the treaty gave Natives agency by presuming that they were a foreign power external to the U.S. and possessed the right to negotiate with Congress. Here, Black commendably maintains the heterogeneity of the discourse that he studies. Although at times it makes sense to use the descriptor "American Indian" to discuss pan-tribal activism or common resistance tactics, Black parses out key distinctions between the rhetorical tactics specific to each nation. For instance, he notes that whereas the Choctaw nation often relied on memories of past Native sovereignty under the previous administrations of Washington and Jefferson, Creek and Chickasaw rhetors used the concept of moral inheritance to claim a sacred connection to the land not unlike the Puritans' errand into the wilderness. In contrast, the Seminole nation often used harsh invectives against removal, whereas the Cherokees appealed to civic republicanism.

In chapters four and five, Black repeats his method by juxtaposing government rationales for the policy of allotment with the resistance rhetoric that exposed the policy from within. He argues that Western expansion post-removal created a new imperative for the government to divide common-held Indian lands for individual ownership. Black develops the concept of *identity duality*, or the tension between a separate Indian identity and the forceful inclusion under citizenship. A productive contribution to scholarship on citizenship, Black's navigation through contradictory rhetoric in defense of both forceful inclusion (assimilation) and exclusion (segregation) demonstrates how the concept of citizenship is often fraught with self-serving racial and colonialist logics. Here, Black focuses on pan-tribal rhetoric employed as a response to government homogenization of indigenous peoples.

Using petitions, memorials, biographies, literatures, and performances to resist the policy of allotment, American Indians capitalized on the progressive sentiments of the late nineteenth century. Resistance rhetoric employed images of "safe Indians" to gain an audience with reformers to expose the colonial logics of allotment. Perhaps the best part of this chapter is Black's specific attention to the rhetoric of indigenous women who exploited so-called feminine rhetorical forms, such as biographies and literature, to gain a sympathetic white audience.

Finally, Black's conclusion reminds readers of the stakes of his project. Returning to anticolonial theory, though the work of scholars such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, Black argues that his narrative of removal and allotment evinces how colonialism can neither totally subjugate Native identities nor erase their influence in the creation of national identity. The final chapter delivers on the promise that Native resistance rhetoric enabled policy gains in the future or, at the very least, provided a rhetorical framework to reshape government policy. The final chapter explores the undoing of allotment and the challenges of extending citizenship to Native nations. Black shows how the Indian Citizenship Act (1924) and the Indian New Deal (1934) were important policy gains that would not have been possible without centuries of resistance rhetoric. Those acts simultaneously undid the damage of allotment and reasserted government control. Black cautions that these acts ultimately consolidated power over Native self-governance in the federal government.

Although Black reminds readers that Native resistance rhetoric slowed and frustrated colonialism, the book incidentally concludes on a fatalistic note. Indeed, even the progressive changes that resistance rhetoric made possible did not fundamentally alter the colonial hierarchies built into the structures of U.S. law and policy. Readers might be left with the sense that Native rhetorical agency is limited to micropolitical acts of resistance that, although clever and subversive, do not ultimately advance self-determination. If, however, one expanded the scope of this project later into the twentieth century, one would find that indigenous activists elaborated on nineteenth-century decolonization rhetoric to successfully make the case to end the disastrous policy of termination, to increase American Indian control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to fund tribal colleges and health services, to preserve tribal language and religions, and to make self-determination government policy. Of course, none of these achievements were a panacea and settler colonialism is ongoing. Moreover, I recognize that such an undertaking is beyond the scope of Black's book; how-

ever, Black could have taken opportunities to emulate scholars such as Randall Lake, Richard Morris, and Phillip Wander by tracing in his conclusion the influence and continuity of an argumentative frame such as “moral inheritance” to contemporary politics. Yet this is not a limitation of Black’s book but an invitation for scholars to use the archival work and insightful critical analysis presented in *Removal and Allotment* to make connections between the past, present, and future of indigenous activism.

*Removal and Allotment* is an exemplary work in rhetorical history, social movements, and anticolonial rhetorical criticism and theory. Through close textual analysis and a scholarly commitment to decolonization, Black illuminates what previous journeys to the colonial archives looked past or dismissed as acquiescence or mere “back talk.” The book is sophisticated enough to be taught in graduate seminars on rhetoric and public culture without being inaccessible to advanced undergraduates. *Removal and Allotment* has the potential to shape future scholarly conversations not only on American Indian resistance rhetoric but also on theories of citizenship, decoloniality, and the politics of racial identity in U.S. public culture.