OUT OF THE BINARY AND BEYOND THE SPECTRUM

Redefining and Reclaiming Native American Race

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Abstract

Race in the United States is most often talked about in terms of black and white, sometimes as a spectrum running from whiteness to blackness. Such a conception does not map onto actual racial structures in the United States and excludes Native Americans. This article will criticize this binary, detailing a theory of race in which colonialism and racism are prior to racial formation, following Patrick Wolfe and Michael Omi and Howard Winant. In assembling this theory, this article attempts to bridge philosophical critical race studies and Native American and Indigenous Peoples studies. It argues that to be a member of a race is to be in a relationship of dominance and resistance with settler colonialism. It discusses the implications of a political mode (following Tommie Shelby) of Native race in greater detail, including how it can be differentiated from ethnicity and tribal identity, and how it might be politically useful in anti-domination solidarity. Finally, the article examines the similarities and differences between Native race as construed here and concepts of being Indigenous, suggesting that what Indigenous is at the global level, Native race may be at the local.

Keywords: Native Americans, Indigenous Peoples, American Indians, racial binary or spectrum, localized race, Indigenous, settler colonialism

I have in my wallet a card that certifies my membership in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, by virtue of the tribe's policy of enrollment by lineal descent. I am quite literally a card-carrying Choctaw. I am also a white person. My Choctaw identity is an important one in my life, and I feel a duty of solidarity to my tribe. While I am neither ethnically nor culturally a Choctaw, this road is open to me. I have had the opportunity to meet leaders of the tribal government; I could take language classes and move to Durant, Oklahoma, confident of being welcomed into the community. Over time, I could be drawn into the culture, adopted into the ethnicity.

But even if I did all those things, there would still seem to be something missing, some way in which I would still not *completely* be Native American. I occupy the social position of white male, and joining more fully into the Choctaw community is unlikely to change that. I am missing the racial aspect of Nativeness, and to say that a card in my pocket and a genealogical story are enough to deny my whiteness would be what Lewis Gordon calls "serious sadism," a denial of "others' points of view, a task that would render others patently not-others" (Gordon 2000, 77). No matter what I call myself, much of my race-treatment will be dependent on what the particular society around me views my race to be. As Paul C. Taylor puts it, "[W]hiteness is a position on a social landscape, it is a global property that I possess, or not, in virtue of my role in a system of relations and forces. And I can't just unilaterally decide how I stand with respect to all that" (P. Taylor 2004, 130). I am certainly a Choctaw, but I am just as certainly not (racially) a Native American—no one treats me like I am; I do not occupy that social position and probably cannot. As Neshnabé (Potawatomi) philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte puts it, "[R]ecognition by an Indigenous political entity . . . is not necessarily the same as belonging to an Indigenous people" (Whyte forthcoming, 2). What I seek to do in this article is articulate a concept of race that at once makes sense of the Native American racial experience—of the grouping together of disparate peoples by the forces of colonialism—and is also liberatory, providing normative support to antiracist, anti-domination projects. This begins with seeing races as forged by racism and colonialism and resistance thereto, and it requires differentiating race from thicker conceptions of personal identity,

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ethnicity, culture, tribal membership, political affiliation, and Indigenous identity. In the first section, I demonstrate that prevailing models of race fail to account for and often erase Native American experience. In the second, I delineate a model of races as localized, historical constructs that originate from colonialism and racism. In the third section, I argue for utilizing the colonialist terms "Native American" and "American Indian" and the colonialist concept of race to differentiate this type of identity from ethnicity and tribal affiliation. In the fourth section, I argue that race concepts can and should be appropriated to promote solidarity within and between marginalized racial groups. Finally, I examine Native race in light of theories of Indigenous identities, including thicker theories with which Native race is compatible and may be employed alongside, and thinner theories of Indigenous as a social position that bear resemblance to my view of how races should be defined. Native race should be seen as one among many conceptions of social position and identity; there are many ways to be Native, and racially is but one of them. Similarly, employing the concept of Native American race is just one of many possible anti-domination projects, one targeted at the specifically racist injustices faced by Native people.

1. Beyond the Binary

U.S. critical race philosophy has tended to focus largely on a black-white binary, sometimes exclusively and other times in terms of a spectrum running from whiteness to blackness. Probably, the stark contrast has not been entirely pernicious; if it has ever been of conceptual aid in the ongoing fight against antiblack racism, then it has had an important part to play in our social history. But as Linda Martín Alcoff rightly argues, "[T]he dominant discourse of racial politics in the United States inhibits an understanding of how racism operates vis-à-vis Latinos/as and Asian Americans" (Alcoff 2003, 6). Examining the historical shift in U.S. race talk from a tripartite (red/white/black) model to the binary model prevalent now, Yael Ben-zvi calls both inaccurate "reductive interpretations of complex exclusionary realities" (Ben-zvi 2007, 201). Taylor notes, "Native Americans are . . . multiply anomalous" (P. Taylor 2004, 145) in such systems. It is not meaningful to argue whether Native Americans have suffered more or less than blacks, or which group is farther from whiteness and privilege. Models

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based on this idea cannot really make sense of how American Indians are positioned by race. This is equally true for all racial groups, as other commentators have pointed out: the sufferings, experiences, and identities of Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and mixed-race persons all suggest that a descriptively accurate and normatively effective theory of race will have to go beyond binary and spectrum models of racial oppression that ignore different *racisms* faced by different groups.

Understanding races and racisms is significantly inhibited by such models that can only call Native American experience "anomalous." As Patrick Wolfe says, "[A]ccounts of race in the USA that marginalise the unstable racialization of Indigenous people in comparison to the ineradicability ascribed to Black heredity are participating in the very phenomenon they purport to describe" (Wolfe 2016, 16). A model cannot describe any race if it cannot account for all races, because of the complementarity of racial regimes in the colonialist project. Thus, antiblack racism in the United States is *better* understood alongside antinative racism: as Indigenous peoples were pushed off the land, slaves were brought in and forced to work it (Wolfe 2016, 26). Alcoff adds, "Native peoples were represented as vanquished, disappearing, and thus of no account. The paradigm of an antiblack racism intertwined with slavery does not help to illuminate these and other specific experiences of other nonwhite groups" (Alcoff 2003, 14). A key feature—perhaps *the* key feature—of antinative racism is erasure and many theories of race redouble this oppression. It is thus no wonder that Indigenous and Native people and scholars are often resistant to race talk.

Two extremely common models that erase Native people are race as color (phenotype) and race as biology—or both at once, based on what Naomi Zack calls a "presumed, but false, biological foundation" (Zack 2010, 877) for race. Although the color line figures prominently in his account of race, W. E. B. Du Bois's expanded (early) definition of race goes far beyond color, calling each race "a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions, and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together" (Du Bois 1897/1996, 230). Du Bois recognizes that different races interact in different ways, exist in different forms in different places, allowing him to say, "[R]ace differences have followed mainly physical race lines, yet no mere physical distinctions would really define or explain the deeper differences—the cohesiveness and continuity of

these groups" (Du Bois 1897/1996, 231). Notwithstanding the fact that races are treated *as though* color lines were of paramount importance, Du Bois can deny that color lines and racial groups essentially mark the same entities.

The advantage of the Du Boisian concept is that it can be manifested in numerous ways across the world, whether between "the brown Turanians of India" and their "yellow conquerors" (Du Bois 1900/2014, 113) or the "most curious and complicated race conflict between Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Jews, and Poles" (Du Bois 1900/2014, 119). Here we see races as groups in relationships of domination or conflict—though not essentially or perpetually. An older Du Bois puts it, "[T]he black man is the man who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia" (Du Bois 1940/1984, 153. Quoted in P. Taylor 2000, 109). Races are socially constructed and enforced, varying from place to place; in Wolfe's words, race is "versatile, fluid, and opportunistic . . . the same group can be excluded under some circumstances and included or assimilated under others, with the end – colonial domination – remaining constant all the while" (Wolfe 2016, 271).

Jorge J. E. Gracia's account bridges color and biology: "[M]embers of a race must share in one or more of a set of genetically transmittable perspicuous features generally associated with the race" (Gracia 2005, 148), which "is tied to descent and, therefore involves the impossibility of change" (Gracia 2005, 146). Because Gracia admits that it is not necessary for "the lists of features associated with one race at a particular historical juncture" to remain exclusively bound to that race in subsequent times (Gracia 2005, 103), his conception allows for change in social circumstances but nonetheless privileges genetic relatedness.

Similarly, Philip Kitcher defends what he calls a "minimalist" biological conception of race (Kitcher 1999, 92), based not off of contemporary populations but on their ancestors and patterns of descent in the interim generations (Kitcher 1999, 94). Reproductive isolation is the key to his conception of race (Kitcher 1999, 95), as races are those groups descended from previously isolated populations who, even after coming into contact, continued to reproduce largely among themselves over generations. For Kitcher, this explains how "phenotypic differences have been fashioned and sustained" (Kitcher 1999, 97). Races are historically separate breeding populations, for which the "rates of interbreeding for some groups are [still] very low," keeping races relatively differentiated (Kitcher 1999, 98).

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These divisions of humanity, however, are extremely poor matches for Native people as a group, or even for individual tribes. Native persons are often of mixed and diverse tribal and non-Native ancestry, as Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Traverse Lake Reservation) demonstrates by detailing her own official blood quantum categories: "13/32 total Indian blood" from four different tribes (TallBear 2013b, 62–63). Groups and individuals of mixed ancestry or "crossblood" likewise defy this construal of race, despite their experiences of racist oppression (Lawrence 2003, 16–18; Goeman 2009, 177)—often including explicit social and legal exclusion from protections based on racial belonging.

Focusing on genetic populations is problematic on other grounds also. Says TallBear, "Indigeneity recast as genetic becomes a discourse of scarcity and death" (TallBear 2013a, 516). Furthermore, she notes that blood quantum DNA tests for tribal membership exclude people who ought to count as tribe members—for instance, Black Seminoles and the spouses and adopted children of acknowledged members—while including racial whites (much like myself) with minimal Native ancestry and a lack of "tribal cultural knowledge, life experience, and/or political affiliation" (TallBear 2003, 97). Moreover, TallBear calls genetic definitions of Nativeness, "assertions of cultural authority" on the part of non-Native biologists (TallBear 2007, 421). Whyte echoes TallBear's assertion that scientific definitions of Nativeness can remove Indigenous peoples to the realm of the dead and dying of history, adding that they "can serve to sever contemporary Indigenous peoples from their lands and ancestors" (Whyte forthcoming, 8). Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan) argues that "we *feel* our histories as well as think them" (Million 2009, 54), strengthening TallBear's argument that Native peoples ought not give ground in the "contest for meaning and authority" (TallBear 2007, 422). Science, blood, and DNA cannot alone define Native identity, not racially and certainly not otherwise.

Understanding Native race requires a revision of race itself as a concept, jettisoning the baggage of any biological underpinning to race, from phenotype to genetics, from Nineteenth Century pseudoscience to modern medicine. Such theories either divide and exclude Native people, or flatten the differences between Native groups. Whyte argues that such dilemmas "in which each decision option will produce erasure" (Whyte forthcoming, 13) are at the crux of the oppression of Indigenous peoples, and biologically-founded theories of race are prime examples of the conceptual erasure of Native Americans.

2. Racism Is Prior to Race

Theories like those of Du Bois, Kitcher, and Gracia suffer from a common implicit error: assuming that races are meaningfully bound groups of people *before* encounters with racism. I argue the opposite: that racism's first violence is to group people together who were previously separate and subject them to oppression of various and particular kinds because they belong to this newly-formed group. As Apache philosopher Viola Cordova says,

> If, at the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, there was no such thing as the singular notion of all indigenous peoples being "Indians" there is now such a thing. This has come about through the fact that Native Americans find that, despite forced attempts to assimilate them conceptually as well as physically, they have more in common with other indigenous groups, regardless of their obvious differences, than they do with the conceptual framework of the European colonizer. (Cordova 2007, 102).

Among this "more in common," is the racial mode of Native identity; Cordova's explanation echoes Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation that begins in colonization (Omi and Winant 1994, 62). "Just as the conquest created the 'native' where once there had been Pequot, Iroquois, or Tutelo, so too it created the 'black' where once there had been Asante, Ovimbundo, Yoruba, or Bakongo" (Omi and Winant 1994, 66). TallBear agrees that "U.S. race categories . . . are coproduced with Euro-American colonial practices" (TallBear 2013b, 31). Race, then, is an historical process of falling under the scrutiny of the dominant (usually white) gaze, being given a place in a racially ordered social hierarchy, and responding to it. This racial formation continues: Asian Americans are born where once were only Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Thai, and more; Latinas/os are made by flattening the incredibly complex racial, ethnic, and cultural mixtures of South and Central America. Racisms and the groups they form change over time and are articulated differently in different places, but when they bind disparate people together into enduring groups, these groups are races.

Races are spatio-temporally located, subject to change over time and reinterpretation across place. The same person might be Mestizo, or even white in Argentina, but likely finds herself Latina in the United States.

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A person considered Indigenous in Guatemala also finds himself Latino in the United States. This is not to deny differential treatment based on how white she or he may look (or sound), just to deny that that treatment is racism, in and of itself. Rather, this kind of colorism is an *aspect* of the racism inflicted on non-whites in the United States—only whites largely avoid discrimination based on skin color. Charles Mills has argued, however, for the existence of polycentric global white supremacy (Mills 2015). While it is not possible to work out the interactions of his view and mine here, a localized concept of races need not be inconsistent with a global system of meta-level racial dominance. Wolfe identifies this same dilemma and solves it by applying a two-fold analysis of race, first of the "shifting contested ways in which a particular group becomes racialised after co-optation by Europeans" and second, "the ways in which [these] specific racialisations . . . are coordinated at the level of the whole" (Wolfe 2016, 27), an important point which will be taken up when Native race is compared with Indigeneity.

Individuals and entire groups may move in and out of races; Alcoff discusses the integration of Jewish and Irish people into U.S. whiteness (Alcoff 2003, 19-20) and the expulsion of Arab Muslims from that category (Alcoff 2003, 21). In the Native context, Wolfe argues that thousands of the Mississippi Choctaw accepted allotment and assimilated into U.S. society and lost their Native race: "Without the tribe, for all practical purposes, they were no longer Indians," not because of light skin color, wealth, mixed-bloodedness, or "passing," but because they ceased to be treated as Native, by whites, by each other, or by other Native entities (Wolfe 2016, 185–86). Their example stands in contrast to Cherokee leader John Ross, whose light skin and "Scottish ancestry . . . proved no bar to losing his wife, Quatie, on the Trail of Tears" (Wolfe 2016, 168). The races of Ross and of the Mississippi Choctaw were determined by the treatment they received in the location they were in. For each individual—though their race will remain with them anywhere insofar as it is internalized—their race is best thought of as a race-in-place: Asian American-in-the-United States, Jewish-in-France, First Peoples-in-Canada, Roma-in-Hungary.

Though races and racisms have spread across the globe, race and colonialism cannot be separated. Instead, race itself must be viewed in the context of settler colonialism and its "range of suppressive and divisive strategies that are typically framed in the idiom of race" (Wolfe 2016, 26). According to Ben-zvi, the changing needs of the colonial U.S. state

occasioned the "shift from a tripartite racial model to a binary one [with] the simultaneous appropriation of Native American cultures into, and the exclusion of African American culture from, national culture" (Ben-zvi 2007, 203). The process of colonialist racialization has not only constructed the race categories of Black and Native, but continues to inform two of these groups' most important antiracist demands: civil rights on the one hand, and sovereignty on the other.

Races then, are historically and socially constructed groups, defined by racism and colonial dominance, as well as responses to it. Following Marxist Antonio Gramsci, Omi and Winant characterize race as among the "'regions' of hegemony," along with gender and class (Omi and Winant 1994, 66). It is a politically relevant social construction, "constituted by a combination of coercion and consent" (Omi and Winant 1994, 67). Built into hegemony, consent is important to acknowledge, for it allows colonization to be internalized, but also for creative agency to be employed. This kind of agency is critical to utilizing race concepts for solidarity in political action against oppression.

Insofar as they are objects of domination, races can be conceived of as those groups of people who are dominated in roughly the same way, for roughly the same reasons—or they are socially descended from such a group.[1] Wolfe adds importantly, "No account of race that fails to account for its emotive virulence can be adequate. Fear, hatred, rapine, violence, callousness, and cruelty are of the essence of race" (Wolfe, 2016, 12). Appearance and heredity loom large in conceptions of race, but racism and perceptions of race may be based on other forms. Mills identifies "seven possible candidates for racial self- and other-categorization. . . . Bodily appearance, ancestry, self-awareness of ancestry, public awareness of ancestry, culture, and self-identification" (Mills 1998, 50).[2] Treatment of individuals varies greatly based on gender, class, wealth, sexuality, education, and other factors. Some groups may be relatively privileged within a race, and others more oppressed. Claims of belonging to one race or another may be socially adjudicated (inside and outside of the race in question) by the presence or absence of these features and perhaps others.

When thinking about what it is to be racially Native, one must begin with antinative racism and responses to it (a process applicable to any other racialized group in a particular place). A complete discussion of racist violence against Native Americans is not possible here, but it should be noted that it is systemic and pervasive (see, among many others, Cordova 2007,

163; Grande, San Pedro, and Windchief 2015, 110; Niezen 2003, 204), environmental (Whyte forthcoming, 10; Niezen 2003, 149–50), and gendered, sexualized, and rapine (Goeman 2009; Hall 2009; Whyte forthcoming, 12; Lawrence 2003, 6). Moreover, colonialist racism is "a *felt*, affective relationship. Moral stigmata are produced and attached to race gender and sexualities lived as structures of feeling" (Million 2013, 46).

Erasure, both in terms of political choices presented by settler states and racialized articulations of Indigeneity (Whyte, forthcoming, 13; see above), is central to historical and ongoing colonial oppression. It can be seen through racist and sexist categorization (Million 2013, 43; Hall 2009, 24), ongoing physical and political isolation (Niezen 2003, 191; Goeman 2009, 171, 183), assimilation (Wolfe 182–88; Goeman 2009, 172), cultural appropriation (Merskin 2001, in advertising; Tahmahkera 2008, on television; M. Taylor 2013, in sports; Gagne 2003 and Niezen 2003, 52, 180–82, by cultural and environmental romanticization), and through "extremes of hypervisibility or invisibility" (Hall 2009, 17). According to Ronald Niezen, Indigenous peoples are often seen as "only afterimages of destroyed societies" (Niezen 2003, 180) and thus denied agency and reality. "Elimination, rather than its strategic repertoire, is the core feature" of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 201) and—I argue—to antinative racism.

All such erasures can be located within the widest arching theme of antinative racism: the ubiquitous "vanishing Indian/Indegene" trope and the real methods of elimination that have accompanied it. It is important to remember that this myth is false. As Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) puts it, "Native communities have been depicted and conceived as transitory, dying communities, despite the reality of vitality and strength of Native people who refuse to give up ground to the forces of settler-colonialism" (Goeman 2009, 170). Among others, TallBear notes an estimated "250 to 600 million individuals belong to over 4000 'indigenous' groups" (TallBear 2013a, 510). Categorizing Native Americans as a race at all can be elimination. As Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) says: "For Indigenous people, to be defined as a race is synonymous with having our Nations dismembered. And yet, the reality is that Native people in Canada and the United Sates for over a century now have been classified by race and subjected to colonization processes that reduced diverse nations to common experiences of subjugation" (Lawrence 2003, 5). Redefining race by acknowledging its inextricable links to violence and colonialism is critical to reclaiming it as a liberatory concept of solidarity instead of an oppressive one.

On a general level, races are a thin kind of social positioning without any essential characteristics. To be a member of a race is to be placed in a racial category in a particular society and subjected or potentially subjected to certain treatment because of belonging to that racial category. For non-whites, this treatment includes oppressive, racist violence. But races are also subject to change, to reinterpretation and reclamation by their members as vehicles for cohesive political activism. The disparate peoples of North America have been categorized as racially American Indians; they have been and remain subjected to much racist violence, but have also found commonality through shared struggle, as I discuss in section 4.

3. Disentangling Race from Tribe, Nation, and Ethnicity

To properly understand race—Native or otherwise—it is necessary to disentangle racial identities from other types; in the Native case it is particularly important to draw clear lines between race, tribal citizenship, and ethnicity. These other ways of being Native have sometimes been considered sufficiently explanatory and liberatory to eliminate racial categorization of American Indians. I believe, however, that my definition of Native race can both avoid the well-grounded objections to other racial definitions of Nativeness, while offering additional descriptive and normative value over theories that exclude race.

Sahnish (Arikara) and Hidasta First Nations scholar Michael Yellow Bird offers the terms “Indigenous Peoples” and “First Nations Peoples,” to replace “’Indian,’ ‘American Indian,’ and ‘Native American’ because they are ‘colonized identities’ imposed by Europeans and European Americans” (Yellow Bird 1999, 5). This political and social concern has significant conceptual relevance. Yellow Bird is correct that these identity labels have come from colonization and are therefore loaded with violence, but I diverge from his usage for two reasons. The first is simply that of standing. Yellow Bird admits that Indigenous Peoples in the United States overwhelmingly prefer to be called either “Native American” or “American Indian” (Yellow Bird 1999, 3).[3] Yellow Bird, racially, ethnically, and culturally Indigenous, is an insider with a valid claim to the word “we.” Though a Choctaw citizen, I am not racially, ethnically, or culturally an insider, and lack the standing necessary to criticize popular terminology.

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The second reason I continue with the colonizer's terms is conceptual. Yellow Bird suggests combining the individual tribal identity with the First Nations label to form an ethnic identity to "supplant the former racial identity" with, for example: "Sahnish—First Nations" (Yellow Bird 1999, 17). Yellow Bird's label is intentionally more specific than can be used to discuss race. A part of Yellow Bird's objection to these terms is what he considers the impossibility of applying a generally acceptable racial term the great diversity of over "550 distinct tribes, including 223 Alaska Native villages" (Yellow Bird 1999, 3). Of course, a general racial concept is what I hope to have given. While I do not wish to allow my racial conception to cast "a monolithic identity for Indigenous Peoples" (Yellow Bird 1999, 4) or reproduce colonial violence, I do wish to examine the differences between the broad brush of race and the more specific ethnic, national, and tribal identities.

Whyte argues rightly that Indigenous identity may be a result of "knowing that one was adopted but not knowing from what Tribe . . . unable to enroll in any particular Indigenous identity" (Whyte forthcoming, 4); it is hard to how such an identity can be validated under Yellow Bird's system. The goal is not to suggest that such identities are subsumed within the racial category, but to argue that race thinking has affected people in a way that cannot be described by classifying and amalgamating ethnicities—and that race thinking of a positive sort is needed to combat racism.

Gracia makes the point well: "If race, ethnicity, and nationality are mere fictions, ghosts without substance, how are we going to eliminate racism, ethnicism, and nationalism?" (Gracia 2005, 144). I contend that American Indians of all nations and ethnicities face the *same* enemy of racism, and fighting it will be more effective with the right conception of race. Lawrence describes "a narrow but powerful sense of Native identity," commonly held by Indigenous people in the United States and Canada (Lawrence 2003, 22); I argue that this identity is racial. Yellow Bird says rightly, "Labels should also promote solidarity among Indigenous Peoples while at the same time recognizing the diversity and sovereignty of each group" (Yellow Bird 1999, 17). My hope is that the concept I put forward is useful for this. That said, "What may seem like respectful labels to one person could be regarded as disrespectful to others" and when referring to an individual, it is always best to take Yellow Bird's advice and ask "how they want to be identified" (Yellow Bird 1999, 17). The very real danger of essentialist, absolutist racial categories is what Yellow Bird argues against.

In contrast to his eliminativist solution, I simply propose a racial conception of a different, thinner sort, which spans a multiplicity of tribal and ethnic identities without denying or flattening them. TallBear says, though it is real, "[A] relational definition predicated upon invasion . . . is often not the primary identity" of Indigenous peoples (TallBear 2013a, 514). The concept of race I advocate for need not be anyone's primary marker of identity.

Separating Native American race from ethnic and tribal identities is crucial because these have been denied to Native Americans for so long, on racist grounds—a recurring theme in U.S. policy toward Native Americans. Eliding these ethnicities into race is to repeat that domination, but denying the reality of shared race is to lose "a unique window through which we can look at a section of human history" (Gracia 2005, 97) and see ways to "overturn the oppressive, racist structures that are embedded in our social institutions" (Gracia 2005, 98).

To develop a concept of race that is not totalizing or essentializing, it is necessary to contrast race with ethnicity, which Gracia describes as "based on a series of changing relations that tie the members throughout history," which need not involve genealogical descent (Gracia 2005, 49). This thick and relational account of ethnicity seems to work well for the relationships that obtain among members of individual tribes, which TallBear calls "a networked set of social and cultural relations based on [a broad view of] biological relatedness" (TallBear 2013b, 59). Race is simply not so thick as this.

Practically speaking, a return to the case of my own tribal identity—what Gracia would call "national"—demonstrates that a distinctly racial category is necessary to make sense of the fact that I am both Choctaw and—distinctly—not Native American. In Yellow Bird's terminology, I am not Choctaw-First Peoples, but Choctaw-white. I look white and so do all my immediate family members; I grew up in a mostly-white town and, like many Choctaws, far from Oklahoma. Usually, appearance is all that is needed to situate me as a white person. I am an extreme case; while many Native people are of mixed race by virtue of their self-identification, as well as receiving differing identification and treatment by different others or in different contexts, this is not the case for me. My appearance and family background have insulated me from both personal and structural anti-Native racism, though this is far from the case for all white-looking Native people. I have not suffered the injustices of racism for my connection to the Choctaw tribe and am in no foreseeable danger of ever doing so.

Considering how racist injustice demands redress allows us to see how reducing Nativeness to tribal identity creates yet another erasure-producing dilemma: either the Choctaw Nation's sovereign right to set its own membership requirements should be questioned, or I should have an equal claim to any (non-tribal) government benefits owed to Native people to alleviate antinative oppression. Neither of those positions is tenable. Individuals' eligibility for tribal membership and programs are considerations quite separate to what is owed to Native individuals and groups by colonial states. Erasing people like me from tribal roles because we are not racially native infringes on the self-determination of tribes, but extending government programs to benefit those who are not the victims of racism and colonialism compounds these injustices. Reducing Native identity to ethnicity is no better because, as noted above, I could do everything necessary to join the ethnic Choctaw community, but this would do little or nothing to change how my racial status is viewed by others, let alone my position of privilege in the social structure.

My situation, as a racially white member of a federally recognized tribe is on one end of a long spectrum; cases opposite mine are just as important. Imagine someone who is socially disadvantaged as a Native American. She looks the part, and thus experiences discrimination and alienation on account of her apparent race, but is not an official member of any tribe. With no knowledge of which tribe or tribes she might have a right to affiliation, she lacks any particular Native ethnicity or tribal affiliation, but has nonetheless suffered from settler colonialism and antinative racism. On my view, she is racially Native because she is *treated* as such; if the reason for such treatment is her appearance, it is relevant but coincidental. Just as I (and others like me) do not have valid claims to assistance based on our ability to identify with a particular tribe, the *in*ability of any person subject to antinative racism to identify with a tribe does nothing to dilute their right to redress.

Of course, most Native people do not live out either such extreme case. Intersectionality is more common: many American Indians are mixed-race, phenotypically ambiguous, or appear to be members of some other race. Diversity of appearance is quite common within members of the same Native family. Individual appearance alone is certainly not enough to determine anyone's racial treatment and even white-appearing members of a Native family or community are subject to antinative racism. These complexities often reproduce and compound erasures: "You don't look

Indian to me," becomes a reason to withhold assistance or protection owed to Native people. What the extreme cases illustrate is just as important for all Native Americans: it is critical to disentangle race from ethnicity and tribal identity.

My concept of Native American race can both make sense of Nativeness in urban centers—where some 60 percent of the U.S. Native population lives (Goeman 2009, 172)—and provide a language in which to claim rights and identity across tribal lines, with or without official tribal connections. Whyte agrees that one can be "identified as Native American by both outsiders based on visual interpretation and/or by others who identify as Native American in relation to their involvement in an urban center" (Whyte forthcoming, 4). Lawrence and Million both locate urban acts of racial formation in the violent state exclusion of Native women (Lawrence 2003, 5–9; Million 2009), while Goeman describes how "a vibrant Los Angeles Native community solidified as such by crossing [intertribal and intersectional] lines of difference" (Goeman 2009, 176). In TallBear's words, "The pressures of a colonial state certainly continue to inform indigenous citizenship and identity formation, but Native American tribes have not been passive in this process" (TallBear 2013b, 66). Race formation as a back-and-forth between oppression and solidarity responses opens a space for unaffiliated Native individuals, as well as groups like the Wampanoag Mashpee, who were unable to demonstrate in court their "*authenticity* to whites in terms of their Indianness" (Lawrence 2003, 23; see also my note 3), and the Seaconke Wampanoag who, by phenotype, "do not enjoy an unambiguous indigenous or 'Indian' racial identity," with many members appearing, instead, either white or black (TallBear 2007, 420). On views that privilege phenotype or descent, both groups are excluded. Illustrating the complexities of urban Native racial identities, Million describes Beatrice Culleton's novel of two Métis sisters, one who looks and considers herself Native, and one who "'white' in appearance, valorizes being white" (Million 2009, 59). In its focus on oppression and response, my theory can account for such inconsistent, yet lived racial experiences, as well as the overarching system of racist colonialism.

It is important to consider another danger in articulating theories of what race is, as well as which groups are races. Lisa Kahaleole Hall (Native Hawaiian/Kanaka Maoli) describes "a constant struggle to be seen and acknowledged," in light of theories that erase Native Hawaiians, including "indigenous feminist theories that presume a North American land-base"

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(Hall 2009, 16). On a theory of race involving group formation through shared oppression and solidarity, "Asian Pacific," is not a valid racial category, but a bureaucratic construction, which "has served to disguise the absence of Pacific Islanders in U.S. organizations" (Hall 2009, 23) by eliding them with larger, more visible (and often better off) Asian American groups. Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans have faced very different *racisms* and are, thus, different *races*. Whether or not it is appropriate to consider Pacific Islanders and continental Native Americans members of the same race on my conception cannot be definitively answered here, though some of the issues mentioned by Hall (colonization, language preservation and reclamation, sexualized stigmatization, and environmental degradation) suggest the possibility, as does her claim that their "deepest bond with American Indian women is created through the *shared struggle* to support indigenous nationhood as the base for the health and survival of our people" (Hall 2009, 25, emphasis added). The relevant markers of shared race are shared oppression and shared struggle. For Native Americans across the continental United States, this has produced a commonality of social position and lived experience that does not override tribal, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, regional, or other differences and that obtains in addition to and in spite of other intersectional differences. The unity that is Native race lies in the similarity of many Native peoples' and individuals' relationships with colonialism—in terms of both oppression and resistance.

4. Why Race? Solidarity

Considering the grave harms racism and race concepts have inflicted in general, and on American Indians in particular, it may be tempting to abandon race concepts despite their explanatory value in understanding oppression. The right sort of race concept, however, does more than identify the problem of racism; it allows members to find meaningful identity and mutual solidarity in collective struggles against racism. Given the state of the U.S. political system, Alcoff argues, "[P]olitical power for people of color would require building coalitions" (Alcoff 2003, 6). Alcoff hopes that more dynamic and inclusive conceptions of race will be able to lead also to a better understanding of the racial realities of the United States and persuade whites "that maintaining white dominance for much longer is

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simply not a viability, short of fascism" (Alcoff 2003, 18). A united front of oppressed groups is a potentially powerful political tool.

Questions arise, however, about the desirability of coalition-building from a Native American perspective. Peter d'Errico argues, "Self-government is the primary factor that distinguishes Native American from other 'minority' struggles" because "Native Americans asserting sovereignty are not seeking a 'fair share' in American society but are declaring the existence of a separate domain" (d'Errico 1999, 9). Sandy Grande, Timothy San Pedro, and Sweeney Windchief (Fort Peck Assiniboine Tribe) add, "the (sovereign) struggle to retain land is deeply tied to the struggle to retain identity" (Grande, San Pedro, and Windchief 2009, 111). Million argues: "Indigenism wants more than 'rights.' Indigenists make claims for sovereignty of autochthonous peoples" (Million 2009, 70). Though this goal is a political demand of an importantly different kind than demands for full inclusion and equality, it could nevertheless be pursued through anti-racist political alliances in exchange for supporting the anti-racist causes important to other groups. That many Native American tribal governments and individuals may have significantly dissimilar end goals to each other and to other marginalized groups does not preclude the possibility of coalition-building—particularly when the coalition is governed by the overriding principle of eliminating racist oppression of all kinds. The Standing Rock Sioux are being supported in intra-racial solidarity for their sovereign rights claims against the Dakota Access Pipeline by tribes from Washington state (Taliman 2016) and interracially by the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter 2016). Different Native groups and individuals want different outcomes. As Niezen says, self-determination (like sovereignty) "covers a spectrum of political choices from assimilation into a dominant state to independent statehood" (Niezen 2003, 161; cf. Weaver 2000, 231), and while some of these choices may not be compatible with the goals of other groups, many will be. While Hall argues rightly that "the contemporary [U.S.] conception of race is firmly anchored in civil rights ideologies . . . and does not address very different concepts of indigenous nationhood" (Hall 2009, 26), I argue that this is not reason to abandon categories with current political purchase, but rather incentive to alter them. According to Niezen, "The indigenous peoples' movement does not often combat imposed identities as sources of oppression," but coopts them for liberation (Niezen 2003, 217). This kind of cooptation is what I advocate be done with Native race.

The category, created through oppression, exists and has purchase now; it should be reclaimed.

Similarly, Tommie Shelby calls for racial political solidarity through pragmatic black nationalism. He is primarily interested in utilizing race as a political tool for combating antiblack racism, but "an oppression-centered solidarity is not a matter of being anti-white, or, for that matter, pro-black, but of abhorring racial injustice" (Shelby 2005, 248). Wolfe reminds us, "Amidst all the differences distinguishing the various regimes of race . . . the overriding goal is White supremacy" (Wolfe 2016, 18). Divide and conquer is the classic strategy of racist politics, solidarity the natural resistance.

Shelby focuses more on the *internal* solidarity that comes from mutual struggle: "Although a joint commitment to fighting racial injustice in all its forms can help create interracial solidarity, it is often the shared experience of *specific* forms of racial injustice that creates the strongest motivation to act and the most enduring bonds" (Shelby 2005, 241, italics original). Conceiving of American Indians as a race is helpful for the same reasons as is conceiving of Blacks as a race. Shelby talks of a "specifically *political* mode of blackness . . . understood as the faithful adherence to certain political principles . . . and to emancipatory goals" (Shelby 2005, 246–47, italics original). He is not interested in finding a shared identity or an essential definition of the Black race; commitment to the political mode is all that is needed to as Blacks should be tied by racial injustice and shared struggle. The same principle can apply to Native Americans. Differences between tribes and across regions are real and preclude essential racial definitions, but the struggle against oppression, the struggles for recognition, environmental and political sovereignty, improved social conditions, voting rights, and reparations can be shared by all Native Americans. The American Indian race can and should be a project of political solidarity. Colonialism has thrust many distinct peoples together as Native, but this togetherness is a powerful anti-colonial tool.

5. Is "Indigenous" Enough?

Thus far, I have borrowed much from Indigenous studies and have often cited anti-Indigenous violence as examples of antinative oppression, though, of course, Indigenous and Native are not equivalent. Indeed, a final objection to my application of race is whether concepts involving

being Indigenous are sufficient to explain what I have argued is the racial category of Native American. This objection might be taken in at least two ways: first, Indigenous identity is not race but performs the same or better conceptual and normative work; second, "Indigenous" more or less covers the social positioning I have been calling Native race but, and extends more widely than North America. Definitions of the first sort are often thicker than mine, with features like connection to a particular place. My concept of Native race can coincide with these definitions and both can be employed to fight different aspects of colonialism. When the issue is environmental exploitation and degradation, for instance, thicker conceptions of Indigenous as it relates to the territorial sovereignty of a tribe may be appropriate. When the issue regards voting rights or affirmative action, appeals to race may lead to the relevant legal protections. As to the second, considering thin conceptions of Indigenous identity as racial identities—or at least as analogues thereto—can illuminate both race and Indigenousness.

To situate my theory, it is necessary to examine different and "contentiously debated" (Weaver 2000, 221) views of "Indigenous." Jace Weaver (Cherokee) argues for "something real, concrete and centered" in Indigenous identity (Weaver 2000, 226), involving "a mentality that declares 'I am we'" (Weaver 2000, 227). Detailing different uses of the term "Indigeneity," Whyte says it is "often used to express intergenerational systems of responsibilities that connect humans, non-human animals and plants, sacred entities, and systems" (Whyte 2016, 144), and argues for a concept of Indigeneity "through land-based collective actions." (Whyte forthcoming, 18). TallBear says that Indigenous peoples "understand themselves to have emerged as coherent groups and cultures in intimate relationship with particular places, especially living and sacred landscapes" (TallBear 2013a, 510). For Marisol de la Cadeña, to be Indigenous is to occupy "heterogeneous socionatural worlds" with ontological as well as political differences with others (Cadeña 2010, 360). For each writer, Indigeneity is conceived as too thick to match what I have been calling Native race and cannot be used to explain what *other* races are. While many racially Native people will ascribe to one or more of these Indigenous identifications, not all will. Moreover, in a racialized society, race-based treatment with no (or no obvious) connection to other aspects of Indigeneity will be inflicted upon many people. While these forms of Indigenous identity are often more important than one's racial identity, they do not replace it.

On other conceptions, being Indigenous comes closer to my definition of a race. As Million puts it, "Indigenous claims always point to the . . . original act of colonialism" (Million 2009, 70). Weaver asserts that "colonialism has always posited indigenous societies as dying or dead," (Weaver 2000, 228–29). Wolfe notes that "Black Australians and Red Americans distinctly resemble each other," in terms of shared land expropriation, assimilation, and stereotyping as members of a dying race (Wolfe 2016, 2). Similar styles of colonialism have produced very similar racializations on opposite sides of the planet. Niezen's use of "Indigenous" draws even closer to my view of Native race: "Indigenous peoples are collectively oppressed because they are unique, and as indigenous peoples they face this situation together, on a global scale" (Niezen 2003, 47). Definitions of Indigenous based on social situatedness and shared oppression approximate my definition of race, in which phenotype and genetics are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for racial membership, connecting people of very different locations, appearances, and—likely—racial self-images. To take thin concepts of Indigenous as the same as race, however, is to overlook the ways in which race is localized, specific, and nonvoluntary.

It may seem, then, that Indigenous is a racial category that subsumes Nativeness, but the contrasts between the ways in which Native Hawaiian peoples and mainland Native groups have been dominated by U.S. settler colonialism illustrate race differences between different Indigenous peoples. Despite the similarities between their oppressions, the differences in forms of colonization employed on North America and in the Pacific, including the particularly acute "impact of nuclear testing and global warming on island ecologies," (Hall 2009, 24–25), show that different Indigenous peoples have suffered from very different kinds of oppression.

A return to Wolfe's two-stage theory, of local and global formations of race is helpful here. While the thick conceptions of Indigenous identity are clearly not racial identities on my view, the thinner ones may be—in the global sense. Localized races-in-places parse the differences between groups too finely for Indigenous to be a racial category, but then, it is not local at all. As Niezen says, it is global. On this level, the broadly-viewed forms of oppression and resistance shared by Indigenous peoples in settler colonialist states (and perhaps beyond) may be similar enough to constitute a race; the positive work that Indigenous identity does on the global level—bringing together far-flung peoples in solidarity to fight for sovereignty—Native race does at the local level. To understand native race, we have seen

that race itself constitutes a group formed by localized social positioning of vulnerability to and resistance against particular forms of racism, and that the Native race cannot be reduced to other kinds of identity, whether ethnic, tribal, or Indigenous. Wolfe concludes, "Race is not here to stay" (Wolfe 2016, 271) and I tend to agree. After race is gone, thicker tribal, ethnic, national, and Indigenous identities will remain, while other forms of solidarity will appear. Until then, however, a political conception of Native race can be a powerful force for solidarity against colonialism.

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NOTES

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1. The white race presents a special case. Whiteness itself exists because of white domination of others, and is perhaps best characterized as reflexively oppositional to the dominated race. Just as white domination attempts to prescribe a place within a racial hierarchy to each other race, so it also situates whites in a particular social position: on top.
2. Culture seems to cover, among other things, religion, language, and accent.
3. Together the two are the term of choice for 87.3 percent of survey respondents. Indigenous Peoples from Alaska tend to prefer the term "Alaska Native" (Yellow Bird 1999, 5), so my terminology stands for Indigenous Peoples from the Continental United States.

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