

# Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts

## An Introduction

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TARREN ANDREWS (BITTERROOT SALISH)

The intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world. It needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place.

—Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou)

Medieval studies is experiencing an Indigenous “turn.”<sup>1</sup> Like other turns that have preceded this one—semiotic, feminist, postcolonial—there is a sense of urgency to it, due in part to the practical and ethical questions raised by any change to entrenched methodologies and ways of thinking. Unique to this turn, however, are the epistemic concerns central to Indigenous studies and global Indigenous communities whose knowledges and experiences cannot be fully articulated or realized within Euro-American ontological frameworks. When taking up an epistemically different and politically active discipline like Indigenous studies, medievalists must first attend to lived reality of Indigenous peoples: what has it meant and what does it mean to be Indigenous? What is the role of Indigeneity as an analytic category?<sup>2</sup> What goals are Indigenous studies scholars supporting, and how can disciplines like medieval studies contribute to them? In addition to these questions about contemporary Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity as an analytic category, the Indigenous turn in medieval studies also requires reflexive examinations: How does the fraught history of medieval studies, with its ties to imperialism and role in colonialism, complicate a sincere coalition with Indigenous studies and Indigenous scholars? Is medieval studies’ current interest in Indigenous studies fleeting? If so, can we approach Indigenous studies in an effective and ethical way? If not, how do we reinvent our praxis and ethos to account for the vulnerability of our Indigenous partners? Medieval and Indigenous studies scholars cannot expect these questions to be answered in a vacuum. Arriving at any substantive answers requires not only a “looking in” by medieval studies but also a “looking back” by Indigenous studies.

Only by participating in this reflective process of questioning can Indigenous studies scholars hope to provide an answer to the question posed by this special issue's call for papers: What does it mean for medieval studies to be held accountable by contemporary and ancestral communities of Indigenous peoples whose lives and deaths have created Indigenous studies as we understand it today?

Thinking through these and other questions related to the Indigenous turn in medieval studies opens up the possibility of deep relationality between the two disciplines, enabling Indigenous studies scholars to ask, What kind of future is gained when the medieval past is Indigenousized, seen not as proper to a European lineage but as a tributary to many people's histories across the globe? Exploring Indigenous futurity through medieval European pasts contributes to the far-ranging scholarship of Indigenous studies by reversing the ethnographic paradigms of Euro-American scholars studying Indigenous peoples and reasserting Indigenous sovereignty within the academy. In doing so, Indigenous studies scholars face our/their own questions: How do we/they practice kinship with a field so incredibly different from our/their own? What evidence do we/they use? How do we/they begin to interrogate the early medieval archive?<sup>3</sup>

Many of these questions are asked and answered contemporaneously without much (if any) Indigenous input, often to the detriment of substantive, long-term discussions that might foster lasting kinship and relationality between Indigenous and medieval studies scholars. This special issue is intended to slow down medievalist engagement with Indigenous studies, to ask us all to be more deliberate, to be thoughtful, and to consider first the ethics of kinship and reciprocity that we owe Indigenous peoples, places, and communities who have labored to craft Indigenous studies as an academic field. In other words, this issue asks medieval studies scholars to take the first steps in laying the foundation for long-term commitment to Indigenous studies scholars and their communities, to ask what it might look like to "extend an invitation," rather than "engage with," Indigenous studies scholars. This begins with the difficult work of reflection and self-examination that aims to consider the limitations of Euro-American epistemologies and how to overcome them, think deeply about the exclusionary traditions of our methodologies and how to reassess them, learn from medieval studies' recent failings to respond generously to other politically oriented methodologies, and find ways to hold ourselves accountable to the futures we want to imagine. We do this internal work not with the expectation that Indigenous studies scholars will unconditionally approve of our labor and respond favorably but with the intent of doing so with *ḡest spúʔus*—with a good heart—as my community would say.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of *ḡest spúʔus* is the foundation of Indigenous relationality. Unlike the *bēaga bryttan* (ring giver) of Beowulf's world, who gives gifts in exchange for martial loyalty, Indigenous kinship and all other forms of Indigenous relationality are predicated on doing, being, and giving without the expectation of reciprocity.<sup>5</sup> Acting in *ḡest spúʔus* cultivates an ethic of relationality and kinship that is contingent not on a regular assessment of exchange or a balancing of scales but on continual proof of intent, motivation, and communal goals. Beginning with something like *ḡest spúʔus* destabilizes the Euro-Western epistemologies of capital,

property, and the gift economy, creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being to have a sincere and material impact on medieval studies.

The work collected in this special issue, then, is offered in *¡est spú?us*. It is a snapshot of where we are as a field in the infancy of our Indigenous turn, not a monument for where we want to be. It is collected in the spirit of transparency rather than perfection and published to give interested (or skeptical) Indigenous studies scholars a sense of where medieval studies is coming from and where we might collectively go. The contributors to this issue offer case studies so that we as medievalist and Indigenous studies readers might evaluate, interrogate, and adapt our theory and praxis in concrete terms rather than in the abstract. These essays ask us, both explicitly and implicitly, to consider the following: What is an Indigenous methodology? What does it mean to think about Indigenous studies as one approach among many? How do we make material changes in our processes and procedures to include and support Indigenous peoples? Most important, these authors remind us to consider, Whom is this work for? What is at stake? And how do we craft an ethic that reflects what medievalists have learned from our (racist, colonialist, imperialist) mistakes? It is my hope that these essays collected here are received as an invitation to Indigenous readers and Indigenous studies scholars to join these conversations in the future so that we all might begin to build the relationships necessary to proceed in a tangibly anticolonial way.

With the intention of contextualizing this special issue for readers with varying degrees of familiarity with both medieval and Indigenous studies, this introduction summarizes a partial genealogy of medieval studies that is specifically germane to the Indigenous turn, and reflects on the relationship between Indigenous studies and critical race theory. I argue that contentions between the two have propelled an adoption of Indigenous studies in places where premodern critical race studies has found animosity and rejection. These overviews, while necessarily reductive in places, attempt to narrate the complex confluence of two disciplines that have not yet developed a shared story. This introduction hopes to foster a constructive space where both Indigenous studies scholars and medievalists might meet to find points of coalition and collaboration that positively contribute to our individual and collective anticolonial projects.

### Where We Have Been

If someone was curious about what exactly “medieval studies” entails, they might look up the subject heading “medieval” in the Library of Congress. That person would find over 460 subject headings containing the word *medieval*.<sup>6</sup> Many of them address things most people would expect to see—medieval literature, ecclesiastical texts, book binding, archaeology, kings and rulers, swords, and so on—most of which come from continental Europe and the islands of the North Atlantic. The medieval subject headings support some general stereotypes about medieval studies, namely, that it is largely a European subject and that medieval studies scholars are primarily interested in Latin literature, church-related art, and battlefield archaeology. Despite reaffirming some of the more mundane perceptions of the field, however, the vast number of subject headings speaks to the variety in the

field of medieval studies and proves further that to evoke “medieval studies” as a monolith does a disservice to the nuance of medieval studies scholarship and its practitioners. Although I refer to “medieval studies,” it is important that we remember the vastly different experiences and perceptions that are flattened for the sake of this rhetorical simplicity. The experience of medieval studies I intend to summarize deals primarily with literature, both because the Indigenous turn in medieval studies is grounded most definitively in medieval literature scholarship and because medieval studies, broadly construed, has its roots in philology, paleography, and manuscript studies, all of which have decidedly literary interests.

Haruko Momma summarizes the early days of medieval studies in her book *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*. She argues that nineteenth-century Continental philology, which employed a more comparative approach to linguistic science, began a “cycle of language” that hierarchized communities and cultures, contributing to imperialism and reifying senses of nationalism in European countries.<sup>7</sup> Pre-nineteenth-century “Saxon” had been England’s ‘other’ both linguistically and ethnically,” understood as barbaric and uncivil; however, as Momma shows, the arrival of comparative philology uncovered a linguistic lineage between Old English and Germanic languages that elevated the cultural prestige of Old English, cementing medieval English studies as an elite academic discipline.<sup>8</sup>

The abrupt emergence of early medieval English studies as a prestigious discipline spurred the development of relevant linguistic and paleographic resources, making previously dormant archives available to history and literary scholars once again—provided they had the privileges necessary to succeed in a medieval studies program. The breadth and depth of linguistic, archival, and paleographic training required to be a medievalist—especially in the early days, when most projects focused on making print editions of manuscripts—meant that most medieval studies scholars were white men who came from upper- or upper-middle-class backgrounds that provided early language education, enough funding to luxuriate in their studies, and access to coveted manuscript archives. Despite the relative homogeneity of medievalists in this early period of the field, it is at this point in the mid-nineteenth century that we see the first major divergence in medieval studies between literature and history—one that continues to serve as a dividing line for current debates in the field.<sup>9</sup> Across the spectrum of medieval studies, literature and history share a great deal of primary source material but tend to have vastly different approaches to those sources. Since the semiotic turn in the humanities in the mid-twentieth century, disagreements over the validity of certain approaches have rendered medieval literature and medieval history “frenemies” in medieval studies.<sup>10</sup> These tensions have been particularly visible in regard to politically oriented interventions that propose radical changes to geographic and temporal boundaries. Those approaches are worth summarizing here not just because they illustrate the distance between medieval history and literature but also because the spaces they created have made it possible for Indigenous scholars to see a future for themselves in medieval studies.

Within medieval literature, three primary approaches have contributed to the Indigenous turn: postcolonial studies, the Global Middle Ages movement, and pre-

modern critical race theory. All these movements have engaged with or been fueled by a distinct interest in medievalism, or the appropriation and misrepresentation of medieval culture by nonacademic groups. Medievalism ranges from seemingly more benign pop-culture references, like those in *Game of Thrones*,<sup>11</sup> to more overtly nefarious co-optations, like Anglo-Saxon runic symbols painted on banners and flags flown by white supremacist groups or medieval battles and dates written on assault weapons used in Islamophobic mass shootings.<sup>12</sup> All along this spectrum of medievalisms, the theme that emerges is one of the Middle Ages as distinctly white and European—a pinnacle of success and superiority that has only been muddled by an increasingly diverse and globalized world.

Beginning with postcolonialism, an already well-established theoretical tradition born of Edward Said's landmark book, *Orientalism* (1978), medieval studies pushed back against this view of the Middle Ages. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is arguably the most prolific postcolonial medieval scholar, although John Ganim and Michelle Warren were also early adopters of postcolonialism who helped define the field.<sup>13</sup> Often-cited collections of medieval postcolonial studies include Kathleen Biddick's *Shock of Medievalism* and the collection edited by Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altshul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World*.<sup>14</sup> These scholars generally employ postcolonial lenses to consider medieval material, the scholarship about it, and the popular appropriations of medieval narratives as products of colonial ideologies. For example, in *Medievalisms and the Postcolonial World* Louise D'Arcens and Ananya Jahanara Kabir consider the legacies of the colonial Middle Ages by examining the educational and infrastructural practices that are imposed on colonized peoples and places—Australia and India, respectively.<sup>15</sup> While postcolonial studies brought new parts of the globe and the present into the purview of medieval studies, it would take the efforts of scholars of color to expand the scope of medieval studies even farther.

The Global Middle Ages movement, started in earnest by Geraldine Heng, who edited the eponymous special issue of *Literature Compass* with Lynn Ramey, sought to decenter Europe, thus complicating notions of who and what we think of as “medieval.”<sup>16</sup> This global focus expanded the scope of medieval studies to include Africa and Iberia (which had been largely ignored despite its geographic placement within continental Europe), and to engage more explicitly with non-Latinate texts and cultures.<sup>17</sup> The hope for a Global Middle Ages, much like that of postcolonial studies, was that this new approach to medieval scholarship would more accurately reflect the diversity of the medieval world and defang a medievalism that sees the Middle Ages as cultural capital from an epoch of superior whiteness, evoking it in the name of modern white supremacy.

A Global Middle Ages led not only to encounters between people and places outside Europe but also to revisions of European materials that medievalists had failed to see clearly in the past. Suddenly medievalists saw people of color in places they had not before, like illuminated manuscripts.<sup>18</sup> Scholars outside medieval studies took notice of the potential opening in the field and found evidence of global interactions in stories previously understood as purely fictional.<sup>19</sup> Encountering these peripheral peoples and places in the center of our worlds, for some scholars, brought into question the role of race and racialization in Middle Ages and its rela-

tionship to the systemic racism that continues to impact us today. These scholars—predominantly scholars of color—turned to critical race theory for frameworks that would allow us to think through and critique these structures.

The field's reaction to critical race theory quickly exposed fault lines of deeply rooted racism that crossed the literature/history divide—a revelation that surprised everyone except medievalists of color and those who had been paying attention to the emerging discourse. Pressure along these fault lines built quickly and, in short order, exploded, mostly into digital spaces. Even a casual observer will have likely come across an article in the *New York Times* or the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or the *Washington Post*;<sup>20</sup> a blog post by a professor or right-wing pundit; a Facebook comment section; or a Twitter thread related to the relationships between medieval studies, modern white supremacy, and Euro-American nationalism.<sup>21</sup> But this is fundamentally not an issue of publicity. It is one of politics and praxis. When scholarship overtly or covertly supports hegemonic structures, it is rarely classified as “political.” This has generally been the case for medieval studies, which has enjoyed the privileges of a close relationship to dominant political and cultural discourses, making it easier for some medieval studies scholars to understand their work as “apolitical.” The rise of Far Right nationalism and white supremacist discourse and ideologies—many of which evoke tropes of medievalism—has complicated medieval studies' relationship to political praxis, particularly as it relates to critical race theory.

Critical race theory, developed by people of color for people of color, has an overtly political aim to better, by dismantling structural racism, the lives, living conditions, and communities of people whose bodies are racialized. It is a particularly apt framework for dissecting and combating the logics of white supremacy, for unlike other theoretical frameworks, critical race studies requires that its scholars actively participate in antiracist efforts. Contrary to some critiques, this does not make critical race theory exclusionary, but it does require more labor— affective, personal, and professional—from white people who, by virtue of their own racial privileges, have to work harder to see structural racism. Medievalists of color who have engaged deeply with critical race theory understand that the contemporary issues of race and racialization illuminated by critical race scholars were not modern in their origins but developed out of premodern thinking about race and identity. They quickly developed a scholarly praxis aptly named premodern critical race studies that sought to extend the temporal boundaries of critical race studies and dismantle the systemic racism that excluded scholars of color from medieval studies. The academic ancestry of premodern critical race studies, summarized most recently by Margo Hendricks, is deep, robust, and political.<sup>22</sup> It has established formal collectives, like the Medievalists of Color; inspired special issues of journals and edited collections, including Heng and Ramey's, Whitaker's, and Kim's; and built the RaceB4Race conference.<sup>23</sup> Despite these tangible academic achievements, medieval studies has continued to reject the validity of premodern critical race studies, deeming it less scholarly and less rigorous by virtue of its political aims and passionate calls to action and preferring instead to forward a sanitized, uncritical race studies that performs race-based textual analysis but does not extend that work to the structures that enable such scholarship to happen.

Race studies scholarship that does not take into account politically active ancestries and contemporary obligation to antiracist praxis does exist, but as Margo Hendricks and Dorothy Kim have argued, it does not rise to the level of critical race studies.<sup>24</sup> Uncritical race studies replicates a long tradition of aspiring to objectivity by way of apoliticism. Often it is this version of race studies that finds a foothold in the canon of medieval studies scholarship. The publication and promotion of uncritical race studies, usually by scholars who do not identify as BIPOC (biracial, Indigenous, person of color), then becomes a way for the field to claim inclusivity without more deeply engaging in critical race studies or an antiracist praxis. By publishing a majority of race, queer, disability, and Indigenous studies work by scholars who do not identify as part of those groups, the field has upheld a false sense of objectivity, excising the power and passion of identity politics along with the people who occupy these identities. In “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh summarizes her experiences within medieval studies by saying that “[medieval] scholars’ fears of anachronism, their desires to protect objects of study yield criticism that welcomes me only as an academic, not as a Muslim.”<sup>25</sup> It is an obsession with “objectivity,” disguised as a rejection of anachronism and political activism, that shuts out emic scholarship from the margins to preserve a center that simply cannot hold. Critiques of anachronism, insufficient rigor, and political activism are built on the very notion that there is such a thing as objectivity. Since its inception medieval studies has been in a position to understand its dominant subjectivity—white, heteronormative, Euro-American—as a form of objectivity by which to measure all other scholarship. Imperialist traditions, inherited from nineteenth-century European philologists and compounded by the relative homogeneity of medieval studies scholars, prevent the field from recognizing the role that identity and subjectivity have always played in the development of dictionaries and glossaries, the crafting of editions, and the narrating of history. This is to say not that subjectivity of any kind is inherently bad but that we cannot rely on one subjectivity to judge the rigor of the rest.

While not every medievalist will agree with the claims I have made about objectivity, I think that most are sympathetic to the idea and want to imagine a new kind of field—one that recognizes the power of subjectivity in all facets of our scholarship. Embracing subjectivity creates space to revise critical editions, glossaries, and dictionaries from more diverse perspectives, and recognizes the necessity of plurality in the field. Such an approach recognizes the validity of a more culturally aware “traditional” medieval studies, as well as the rigor of less traditional approaches that are often informed by extended periods of experiential learning from extra-academic communities. A growing number of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ medievalists are bringing new subjectivities into medieval studies, yet this remains a predominantly white, heteronormative field. Thus many medievalists who want to engage in antiracist praxis feel that they are walking a fine line between “allyship” (in Indigenous communities we would call this “kinship”) and appropriation, amplification, and ventriloquism. The fear of getting antiracist work wrong paralyzes well-intentioned people into silence, and, to my mind, this is where we find ourselves today—quietly (and somewhat nervously) embracing an Indigenous turn.

Indigenous studies—when presented as separate from critical premodern race studies—has, in the last year or so, had a rather amicable entry into medieval literary studies despite the similarity in discussions of core issues like settler colonialism.<sup>26</sup> I suspect that several factors have contributed to this amiability, not the least of which is the historical tension between Indigenous studies and antiracism as academic disciplines. I argue that medieval studies might recognize its own struggles with antiracism reflected in some Indigenous studies discourses. This feeling that both disciplines had been positioned as “outside” or “separate from” antiracism in some way has helped medieval studies embrace Indigenous thought and theory much more quickly and magnanimously than it has similarly oriented disciplines in the past.

The core struggle between Indigenous studies and antiracism is summed up nicely in Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) and Enakshi Dua's 2005 essay “Decolonizing Antiracism” and Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright's 2008 response “Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging the Colonial State.” Lawrence and Dua begin their essay by situating themselves: Lawrence as a Mi'kmaw scholar and Dua as an immigrant who came to Canada from India at the age of sixteen. Their essay was developed out of

discomfort with the manner in which Aboriginal people and perspectives are excluded within antiracism. We have been surprised and disturbed by how rarely this exclusion has been taken up, or even noticed. Due to this exclusion Aboriginal people cannot see themselves in antiracism contexts, and Aboriginal activism against settler dominion takes place without people of color as allies. . . . This article represents a call to postcolonial and antiracism theorists to begin to take Indigenous decolonization seriously.<sup>27</sup>

They then identify the unique positioning of Indigenous peoples against the state, specifically Canada, and show how it differs fundamentally from the position of other people of color who, although marginalized, are in a participatory relationship with the state's settler colonialism: “People of color are settlers. Broad differences exist between those [who were] brought as slaves, [who] currently work as migrant laborers, [who] are refugees without legal documentation, or [who are] émigrés who have obtained citizenship. Yet people of color live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands.”<sup>28</sup>

Sharma and Wright (who do not identify their subject positions or community affiliations in the article) take particular umbrage with this assertion that people of color are settlers and that such a category as “settler” would include “the forced movements of enslaved Africans, the movement of unfree indentured Asians, or the subsequent Third World displacements and migrations of peoples from across the globe, many of them indigenous themselves.”<sup>29</sup> Sharma and Wright read *settler* as synonymous with *settler colonizer*, a conclusion not at all suggested in Lawrence and Dua's article. Their discomfort and disagreement with this categorization of “settler” proves that even though Sharma and Wright may not approach decolonization from an Indigenous perspective, they agree with

Lawrence and Dua about the problems presented by settler colonialism. It is the common goal of dismantling settler-colonial structures, held by all four authors, that fuels the contentious disagreement about the category of “settler” and leads to an ungenerous reading of one another’s scholarship. While Lawrence and Dua make clear that the Canadian state’s involvement in the slave trade, immigration, and migration has a direct impact on the racism experienced by those communities, their primary critique is that antiracism fails to consider the role of those structures and the people (including people of color) impacted by them on the ongoing displacement of Indigenous nations. Furthermore, they argue that this failure perpetuates Indigenous erasure, a critique also made in the widely cited article “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” by Eve Tuck (Unangax, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island) and K. Wayne Yang. Ultimately, both Lawrence and Dua as well as Sharma and Wright are concerned with decolonizing—how to understand it and how to do it. But they are at an impasse over how to talk about it and how to classify it. As these essays make clear, antagonism between Indigenous studies and antiracism often comes down to rhetorical disagreements, amplified by the precarious place of both disciplines within academic hierarchies and the variety of immediate threats to BIPOC communities outside the academy. I am reflecting on this set of essays not just to air dirty laundry but to articulate the difficulty of decolonization that includes both the actual act of returning land and the intellectual work required to navigate the complex structures of settler colonialism and racism that entangle us all. This reminds us that although medieval studies has had a particularly contentious and, at times, openly antagonistic relationship with antiracism, specifically premodern critical race theory and scholars, it is not the only discipline to have struggled with finding points of reciprocity. As medieval studies scholars continue to reimagine a more inclusive future for the field, we might look to the emerging coalitions between Indigenous and antiracist studies for a path forward.

More recent Indigenous studies scholarship has done the difficult work of finding commonalities between Indigenous studies and critical race studies, some of which has been highlighted in the American Studies Association’s journal *American Quarterly*.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the June 2017 issue, opening with Robert Warrior’s (Osage) essay “Home/Not Home: Centering American Studies Where We Are” considers the legacies of Indigenous studies, Patrick Wolfe’s contributions to settler-colonial studies, and race.<sup>31</sup> All the essays reflect in some way on the “traces” left by and in each of these discourses, bringing together contentious histories and gesturing toward possible futures of decolonial unity. The collection does not represent an end to or a total reconciliation of Indigenous studies and antiracist disagreement, but it does provide a model for how medieval studies and Indigenous studies might invite (and invent) new ways of thinking about antiracism and scholarship. To that end, we might find ways to embrace, rather than ignore or minimize, the mistakes medieval studies has made and continues to make regarding the role of politics in scholarship.

I suggest that this begins by attending to the political activism on which Indigenous studies was founded. Born of 1960s activism movements by groups like the American Indian Movement and the Indigenous Women’s Network, founded by Winona LaDuke (White Earth Ojibwe) in 1985, Indigenous studies

(known at that time as American Indian or Native American studies), as an academic discipline, can trace itself back to the prolific work of Vine Deloria Jr. Deloria's (Standing Rock Sioux) scholarship and his work with the National Congress of American Indians ran parallel to highly visible protests and occupations, including the occupation of Alcatraz from 1969 to 1971, and landmark legislation like the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. The potent mix of headlines and scholarship reminded the public that American Indian people are not extinct and have rights as sovereign nations. Capitalizing on public interest in Indigenous peoples as more than just relics of the past, Deloria and his contemporaries relied on comparisons between Indigenous and Euro-American ways of being to articulate their differences. While this scholarship, presented most famously in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, is sophisticated and impactful, it represents an early stage of Indigenous studies scholarship that defined itself, in some ways, through a Western gaze in order to make Indigenous peoples visible.<sup>32</sup>

Over the last forty years Indigenous studies scholars have built on these early projects and shifted the discourse, changing how ontological and epistemological differences are articulated. Recent work by Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) and Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) exemplifies the changes in these discussions.<sup>33</sup> These scholars and others do not argue for the validity of Indigenous epistemologies, nor do they define them against Western frameworks; instead, their work begins with the accepted premise that such epistemologies exist—that they are inevitable insofar as they always have been and always will be. By examining Indigenous literature from an Indigenous perspective, these scholars have recovered methods of self-determination that were obscured by processes of elimination and assimilation. Their work shows that Indigenous studies now sits in a place of self-assurance about the inescapability and permanence of Indigenous ways of being.

This history of Indigenous studies scholarship emphasizes how efforts of Indigenous scholars and activists were and still are firmly rooted in present dangers and future possibilities. As a result, we have had little opportunity or cause to think or theorize about precontact Europeans. The political import of the present for Indigenous peoples, and the generally exclusionary nature of medieval studies, has meant that we are among the most underrepresented groups in medieval studies. In fact, until recently, Carter Revard (Osage) may have been the only well-known Indigenous medievalist.<sup>34</sup> The scarcity of Indigenous peoples in the field further contributes to the ease with which Indigenous studies has been taken up as an interpretive lens or approach for non-Indigenous scholars rather than as an epistemically grounded and politically active set of methodologies.

Indigenous studies is now a well-established academic discipline with a global focus that includes Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, the Pacific, and Sami communities in what is now known as northern Scandinavia. This Indigenous visibility, like other aspects of Indigeneity, is a double bind—both a monumental achievement and a new opportunity for harm. In achieving a place in the academy, Indigenous scholars have made ourselves conform to the publish-or-perish ideologies of the academy.<sup>35</sup> To be an academic means engaging with and contributing to a marketplace of ideas, and while responsible Indigenous scholars

are careful about how much of ourselves and our communities to share with the world, it is inevitable that our knowledges are made available to communities that do not have sufficient understandings of contemporary Indigeneity or meaningful connections to Indigenous peoples. In the absence of these Indigenous relationships, Indigenous thought and theory are encountered without the recognition of the fundamental epistemic differences that separate scholars like Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul, Quandamooka). Unlike early scholarship that relied on articulating difference as a way to educate the public about Indigenous peoples and our knowledges, this most immediate wave of Indigenous studies scholarship is, by and large, written by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples. This means that recent Indigenous studies scholarship assumes an advanced degree of experience with contemporary Indigeneity that many readers simply do not have and cannot easily access. In general, scholars raised outside Indigenous communities and trained outside a dedicated Indigenous studies program lack the theoretical and epistemological foundations to engage with Indigenous studies in a way that does not essentialize and appropriate Indigenous knowledges.

This problem has, perhaps paradoxically, been made even more complicated since the shift in Indigenous studies scholarship marked by Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou) seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), which was reprinted in 2012 and has been an important point of access for non-Indigenous scholars interested in Indigenous studies and decolonization more broadly, and taken up all the more earnestly as the global climate crisis fuels an interest in humanities-based ecocriticism.<sup>36</sup> One of the most widely read Indigenous studies monographs, *Decolonizing Methodologies* opened a field that had been necessarily insular. Smith's work offers a map for Indigenous scholars to take our knowledges and epistemologies into other disciplines. The first part of her work presents a cogent critique of the academy's construction, the colonial history of research, and the roles that Indigenous peoples have had to play in this process. She argues that the academy's Eurocentric modes of domination are now inextricably linked with Indigenous modes of self-determination and that any way forward to a decolonial agenda requires a recognition of this entanglement. She says specifically that "the intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world. It needs radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place."<sup>37</sup> In this way, Smith's deconstructive approach is mutually constituted across the Indigenous studies/non-Indigenous studies binary. In identifying the colonial entanglements of research methods and critical concepts like decolonization itself, she makes a claim for a reciprocal remaking of these modes of being within the academy that focuses on decolonization for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This radically compassionate and generous approach to decolonization is one of the more obvious ways to begin thinking about what an Indigenous medieval studies might look like, but it does not accomplish the difficult work of accounting for epistemic difference or automatically mitigate the dangers of appropriation and Indigenous erasure.

### Where We Are; or, Arriving at the Indigenous Turn

These factors—the historical, if not necessarily ongoing, tension between critical race theory and Indigenous studies, and the limited number of Indigenous medievalists—have combined with the academic zeitgeist’s zealous interest in decolonizing everything to bring us here, at the start of an Indigenous turn in medieval studies. Like other calls to decolonize the academy, the Indigenous turn in medieval studies has seemed largely well intentioned—an affective force I do not believe should be taken for granted. However, when creating space for positive affective engagements with our work, Indigenous peoples are, as we must be, careful to insist that non-Indigenous scholars recognize the limitations of Western epistemologies and methodologies to get Indigenous studies “right,” as it were. These limitations all too often result in good intentions that are fundamentally appropriate and complicit in ongoing Indigenous erasure, which Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have called “moves to innocence.”<sup>38</sup>

Moves to innocence are enacted by all settlers—colonists, immigrants, migrants—contemporary and historical, and are linked to the ongoing metaphorization of decolonization. Tuck and Yang, researchers in pedagogy and education, set out to remind readers that decolonization is not a metaphor, a task they feel is a necessary response to an overwhelming use of *decolonize* in education and activist contexts. Examples they use include *decolonize schools*, *decolonizing methods*, and *decolonize student thinking*, but I would add others like *decolonizing syllabi* and *decolonizing medieval studies*.<sup>39</sup> They argue that “when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future.”<sup>40</sup> The primary concern here is that metaphors of decolonization allow for ongoing settler moves to innocence and create space for settlers to “play Indian,” a term they borrow from Philip Deloria’s (Standing Rock Sioux) 1998 book *Playing Indian*.<sup>41</sup> The act of playing Indian is (often unintentionally, I think) achieved when Indigenous thought and theory is employed as a lens without recognition of and attention to the epistemic conditions from which Indigenous knowledges are developed.

Tuck and Yang get to the heart of epistemic difference in a way that is particularly salient for an Indigenous medieval studies. Their argument shows that Indigenous modes of theoretical inquiry and critique are invested in a praxis that dismantles settler-colonial structures, not reforms them. Insofar as settler colonialism is defined as a set of external structures put in place with the express purpose of acquiring territory for settler governments,<sup>42</sup> it goes hand in hand with imperialist and nationalist ideologies that, as Momma has argued, provided the foundation for medieval studies as a discipline. These same ideologies continue to fuel white nationalist interest in medieval culture and contribute to ongoing Indigenous erasure and dispossession, leading us to ask, Under what conditions, if any, can there be an Indigenous medieval studies that actualizes the political praxis of Indigenous studies? And what might it look like?

### Where We Might Go

With that imaginative future in mind, Tiffany Beechy and I crafted this special issue to include traditional, peer-reviewed essays—a mode of discourse understood

by medieval studies to possess a particular kind of value—as well as non-peer-reviewed contributions that honor the variety of ways Indigenous communities engage with and make meaning from our/their scholarship. Poetic translations from Margaret Noodin bring together Anishinaabe and Celtic world views, offering an aesthetic interpretation of epistemes that are central to the questions posed by this special issue. Mindful of how scholarship and politics intersect, we close with an interview between two Native American medievalists, Wallace Cleaves (Tongva) and me (Bitterroot Salish). The interview reflects on this special issue and the state of the field(s), as well as on how the work we do with our respective Native communities impacts our academic work.

The authors in this issue have not definitively answered the questions posed in the call for papers, in part because they are not yet answerable, but their collected work has identified themes of sovereignty, identity, and methodology that give us a place to start thinking about what we want an Indigenous medieval studies to be. The peer-reviewed essays are collected in groups intended to be read together. The first of these groups comprises Cleaves and Nahir Ivette Otaño Gracia's essays, which provoke questions of method and what an Indigenous methodology might look like in medieval studies. Next, Helen Young and Afrodesia McCannon prompt us to consider the role of rhetoric in crafting identities, legislation, and paths of resistance in transhemispheric settings. Their assessment of the past's impact on the present dissects dialectical logics of identity to consider how they shape conceptions of sovereignty for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Erin E. Sweany's critical exploration of comparative approaches between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges sets up a framework through which we might think about Sarah-Nelle Jackson and Brenna Duperron's (Métis) literary essays. While both of these pieces could easily be considered methodologically alongside the essays by Cleaves and Otaño Gracia, they represent, when paired with Sweany's article, a cross section of work from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars thinking through what it means to engage deeply with Indigenous studies as an ethical practice intertwined with politically motivated literary scholarship. Lastly, J. V. Miranda and Stephen Yeager present poles through which we might triangulate our own positions. The only scholar who does not identify as a medievalist in the peer-reviewed section, Miranda is skeptical about the reality of a coalition between Indigenous and medieval studies. His essay finds limits to the political praxis and accepted ethics of the two disciplines that may well be too disparate to overcome. Alternatively, Yeager offers unadulterated hope for anticolonial coalitions between Indigenous peoples and medieval studies by outlining a practical and actionable initiative that leverages the institutional privileges of tenured medieval studies scholars to materially benefit Indigenous students and our communities. His Global Far North project offers a model for all of us to think about community collaboration in a way that privileges the experiences, knowledges, and goals of Indigenous peoples.

Yeager's project presents an effective and impactful way forward—through community collaboration. Although medieval studies has historically privileged monographs and what some have called “monkish” solitary labor, the present reality is that there is too much to know in each field to proceed individually and far

too much at stake for Indigenous communities not to be included in this discussion.<sup>43</sup> There is a very real and obvious danger that an Indigenous medieval studies might be co-opted for the purposes of white nationalist movements, like the #indigenousEuropean or #whitegenocide trends on Twitter, Reddit, 4Chan, and other internet communities. It takes ongoing efforts by Indigenous peoples and our non-Indigenous kin to remain vigilant to ensure that the political import and capital of what it means to be Indigenous remains in the hands of Indigenous communities. This means that an Indigenous medieval studies cannot exist in a vacuum. It cannot be grounded in a fleeting engagement with buzzwords and fueled by a rush to publish. In other words, Indigenous medieval studies cannot be an intersection, or a confluence with competing currents. We can and should have contentious discussions about how we speak about, write for, and practice an Indigenous medieval studies—much as Indigenous studies and antiracism continue to think through what decolonization means and looks like. But through these difficult discussions we must always be able to arrive at our conclusions in *xest spúʔus*, with goals that honor the foundations of kinship and reciprocity with which we hope to begin. We cannot know what an Indigenous medieval studies is until we have longer and more robust conversations with Indigenous scholars. But all these things that Indigenous medieval studies cannot be give us a place to start building on the work collected in this special issue. We begin by extending invitations to those who are interested in laying the foundations for good relations between Indigenous communities and medieval studies scholars.

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TARREN ANDREWS is a documented, unenrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. She is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Colorado Boulder and a cofounder of the Native Graduate Student Group.

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With the exception of Wallace Cleaves, who lives in his nation's home territories, we acknowledge that our presence contributes to the ongoing displacement of these and other Indigenous peoples. We collectively and individually recognize that land acknowledgment is not enough. It is a first step in a long process of decolonization that counters Indigenous erasure with Indigenous visibility and restores Indigenous relationships to the lands with whom they are kin.

It has been an incredible honor and privilege to coedit this issue with Tiffany Beechy. I am grateful for her patience, guidance, and unwavering support. *yo lemlmtš.*

### Notes

- 1 Many medievalists have begun to think seriously about Indigeneity and Indigenous thought and theory. Notable contributions include Adam Miyashiro's (Kānaka Maoli) essay "Our Deeper Past" in the special issue of

- Literature Compass* referenced heavily throughout this special issue, as well as his keynote address “Mythmaking the ‘Anglo-Saxon’” at the 2019 meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxons (ISAS), now known as the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME); the panels “Decolonizing Early Medieval Sovereignities,” organized by Mo Pareles, Robert Rouse, and Wallace Cleaves (Tongva), and “We’re All Migrants, What Now? Borders and Indigeneity in the Middle Ages and Today,” organized by Dongwon Esther Kim and Kathryn Maude, both presented at the 2019 IONA Conference, *Seafaring*; Marjorie Housley’s paper “There’s No Place Like *Edel*” at the 2019 meeting of ISAS, now known as ISSEME; Mary Kate Hurley’s chapter “Choosing a Past” in Overing and Wiethaus, *American/Medieval Goes North*; and Donna Beth Ellard’s “Historical Hauntings” in *Postmedieval* in 2019.
- 2 For a discussion of “Indigeneity” as a construction of colonialism, see Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 31–32.
- 3 Throughout this introduction the use of *our/their* pronouns reflects the editors’ community affiliations: Tarren Andrews as an Indigenous woman and medievalist, and Tiffany Beechy as a non-Indigenous woman and medievalist.
- 4 For an in-depth discussion of Indigenous relationality, see Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 1–32.
- 5 See *Beowulf*, line 35a, in Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s “Beowulf”*, 4. For an in-depth discussion of gift giving and its role in medieval Germanic cultures, see Hill, “Economy of Honor in *Beowulf*.”
- 6 Library of Congress, “LC Linked Data Service.”
- 7 Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*, 11–13, 40–45.
- 8 Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*, 126–29.
- 9 Dorothy Kim, a medievalist of color and a vocal advocate for antiracist scholarship, summarizes this division in her introduction to the *Literature Compass* special cluster “Critical Race and the Middle Ages.”
- 10 It seems that the semiotic turn cemented the idea of history as a conservative cousin of more liberal humanities disciplines, like literature. See Spiegel, *Past as Text*, 3–43.
- 11 These pop-culture references are less benign than we might imagine, as Sierra Lomuto argues in “White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies.”
- 12 Miyashiro has explained the relationship between medieval studies and mass shootings both in “Mythmaking the ‘Anglo-Saxon’” and in “Our Deeper Past.”
- 13 Said, *Orientalism*; Cohen, *Postcolonial Middle Ages*; Cohen, “Introduction”; Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism*; Warren “How the Indian Ocean Made Medieval France.”
- 14 Biddick, *Shock of Medievalism*; Davis and Altschul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World*.
- 15 D’Arcens, “‘Most Gentle Indeed, but Most Virile.’”; Kabir, “Enchanted Mirror for the Capitalist Self.”
- 16 Notably, the call for papers for this issue was published in 2010, and the collection followed only in July 2014, a considerably longer time between call for papers and publication than for other issues of *Literature Compass*. This speaks to the difficulty of publishing, reviewing, and editing Global Middle Ages scholarship in the early days of that subfield.
- 17 See, e.g., Turner, *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*.
- 18 See Keene, *Toward a Global Middle Ages*.
- 19 See, e.g., Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact*.
- 20 Gluckman, “A Debate about White Supremacy and Medieval Studies.”
- 21 See Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists”; Chan, “Medievalists, Recoiling from White Supremacy”; and Chaganti, “Statement Regarding ICMS Kalamazoo.” See also Mary Rambaran-Olm’s Twitter account @ISASaxons.
- 22 Hendricks, “Coloring the Past, Rewriting Our Future.”
- 23 Heng and Ramey, “Global Middle Ages”; Whitaker, “Making Race Matter in the Middle Ages”; Kim, “Critical Race and the Middle Ages.”
- 24 See nn. 22 and 23.
- 25 Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” 2.
- 26 Notably, Miyashiro, one of the few Indigenous scholars to work explicitly on both Indigenous and critical race studies before the “turn,” received much more criticism than I or other Indigenous scholars whose work has come along with the turn and is less directly engaged in critical race theory.
- 27 Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism,” 120.
- 28 Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism,” 134.
- 29 Sharma and Wright, “Decolonizing Resistance,” 121.
- 30 See *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017), on the traces and legacies of settler colonialism and race in American studies, and 69, no. 4 (2017), on transhemispheric Indigeneity and race.
- 31 Warrior, “Home/Not Home.”
- 32 Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*.
- 33 Daniel Heath Justice and Mishuana Goeman have multiple publications that address

- Indigenous epistemologies in this way. I am referring specifically to Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*; and Goeman, *Mark My Words*.
- 34 Revard is most famous as a medievalist for his work on the scribe of MS Harley 2253 ("Scribe and Provenance"). But he is also famous as a poet (see Arnold, "In Honor of Carter Revard").
- 35 Ludlow et al., "Double Binds of Indigeneity and Indigenous Resistance."
- 36 *Decolonizing Methodologies* inspired the three-day panel "Decolonizing Early Medieval Sovereignties" at the 2019 IONA Conference, *Seafaring*. See n. 1.
- 37 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, xii.
- 38 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 7.
- 39 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 1.
- 40 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 3.
- 41 Deloria, *Playing Indian*.
- 42 For this definition and a further discussion of settler colonialism, see Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism."
- 43 The notion of the "monkish" medievalist was suggested by Richard Utz in Schuessler, "Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists."
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