

# Introduction

Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds

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## The African Diaspora in Indian Country

No outsider knows where Africa ends or America begins.

— LESLIE MARMON SILKO (1991, 421)

In the eyes of neighboring slaveholders, Diamond Hill was a splendid plantation—glistening with fields, gardens, livestock, springs, out-buildings, a store, a school, and a pillared, two-story brick home that was the first of its kind in the region. Two of the enslaved black women who lived and labored there in 1811 attracted the notice of a nearby Euro-American missionary. In a diary, the missionary told the following story about Betty, “an African woman” who “had the misfortune fourteen days ago of having her house burned down in the absence of her husband. . . . A deeply rooted superstition caused her not to hurry and put out the fire even though she saw it right away in the distance. Betty claimed that in her country such appearances of fire are often created by witchcraft, and if one looked at it, it would all disappear.” Betty’s relative, named Crawje, was similarly described by the missionary as “a poor, completely ignorant heathen from Africa [who] did not even understand English.”<sup>1</sup> While the diarist, a devout Moravian Christian named Anna Rosina Gambold, saw these two women as unfortunate due to the evidence of their African subjectivity, as twenty-first-century

thinkers interested in cultural continuity, change, and exchange across the African diaspora, we might interpret the women's fractured stories in a different light. Betty's and Crawje's experience, though filtered through Western eyes, reinforces our realization that African beliefs and practices persisted in North America, even as they were transformed and reconstituted in the gristmill of forced displacement and enslavement.

The African women described here did not live in the slave quarters of a Southern plantation on the U.S. mainland. Nor did they live on the Georgia or Carolina sea islands, recognized for their protective encircling of African cultural ways. Rather, Betty and Crawje lived their lives among Native Americans in the Cherokee Nation of the Southeast. They were members of a community of nearly one hundred black slaves, some of whom spoke African languages to the exclusion of English and Cherokee, and many of whom acted in ways that the ethnocentric missionaries described as "crazy" and "wild." (Norton 1970 [1816], 67–68).<sup>2</sup> Black men and women on this plantation, one of the largest in the Cherokee Nation before Indian Removal, did things in an "African manner."<sup>3</sup> In so doing, they had a subtle but discernible influence on the Cherokees around them. Cherokee adults sometimes attended dances in the slave quarters, and Cherokee children who were being educated at the mission school socialized with black children, "riding around the bush with the Negro boys" to the extent that the missionaries feared the Indian children would be led astray.<sup>4</sup> The adaptation of Cherokee cultural ways by enslaved blacks on Diamond Hill is even more apparent, in their fluency in the Cherokee tongue and their use of Cherokee healing techniques in times of illness.<sup>5</sup>

The death of Crawje, Betty's relative, is a moment that encapsulates the Afro-Indian border crossings that occurred in this place and in many elsewhere that traversed Native America. At Crawje's burial, a stricken Betty "wailed terribly according to the customs of *this* country."<sup>6</sup> Betty, a woman who is described in the missionary diary as African by birth and behavior, apparently expressed her mourning as a Cherokee would at the loss of a loved one.

The example of Diamond Hill, a famous Cherokee plantation that has been restored today as the Chief Vann House State Historic Site in Georgia, illustrates ways that people of African descent transported and transformed cultures, created intersectional communities, and built metaphysical as well as physical homes on Native lands and within

Native cultural landscapes. In the process, they altered their interior worlds as well as those of Native peoples. Africans in Indian Country, like Africans in other parts of the Americas, have “exchanged their country marks” with the indigenous peoples with whom they came into contact (Gomez 1998). However, the persistent presence, symbolic resonance, and multifaceted meanings of African-derived peoples and cultures within the spaces of Native America often go unrecognized.<sup>7</sup>

Over the course of four centuries, thousands of black people, dispersed from Africa through the traumatic vehicle of the transatlantic slave trade, were relocated to Native lands and among Native populations in the “New World.” In the aftermath of slavery in the United States, many others freely migrated to Indian Territory of present-day Oklahoma to escape racial injustice and violence. Indian country became, for these displaced Africans, both a literal and a metaphorical home.

The major purpose and goal of this book is to articulate in new ways this space where black experience meets Native experience — to live in it, so to speak. Our proposal is simple: that Native America *has been and continues to be* a critical site in the histories and lives of dispersed African peoples. Indeed, the very language of “New World” communities and “New World” cultures that has become commonplace in African diaspora studies as a means of differentiating peoples of the diaspora from peoples who remained in the African homeland takes as an implicit and undertheorized given the European colonization of Native America.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on the (re)production of personal and tribal histories and the production of cultural forms in the context of African diasporic presence in indigenous North America, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds* provides a means to unpack this assumption, as well as others.<sup>9</sup>

As African Americanists in the main, we also wish to open a dialogue with scholars in Native American studies, to ask not only how Native place and presence have affected black life, but also how black people and cultures have influenced indigenous America, for better and for worse. We are interested in discovering what intimate conversations and negotiations took place between blacks and Indians in the long years after their first encounters; what political issues, strategies, and conflicts emerged out of their shared experience; and what creative works and cultural productions were inspired by their coming together. Overall, we seek in this book to raise and engage the central

question: What happens when key issues in African diasporic experience, such as migration, freedom, citizenship, belonging, peoplehood, and cultural retention and creation, and key issues in Native American experience, such as tribalism, protection of homelands, self-determination, political sovereignty, and cultural-spiritual preservation and renewal, converge?

### **Freedom Dreams: African Americans in Indian Territory**

As slaves they had long been aware that for themselves, as for most of their countrymen, geography was fate. . . . And they knew that to escape across the Mason-Dixon Line northward was to move in the direction of a greater freedom. But freedom was also to be found in the West of the old Indian Territory.

— RALPH ELLISON, “Going to the Territory” (1979)

Perhaps more than any other space in the United States, Indian Territory, broadly defined, has held out the promise of home to black slaves and their descendants. By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many African Americans had come to see the Western lands called Indian Territory as a refuge in America, and more, as a potential *black space* that would function metaphorically and emotionally as a substitute for the longed-for African homeland. (If we also consider the African diaspora in New England, we have the making of an expansive understanding of African subjects and Indian country that might shift the prevailing understanding of Indian Territory’s psychic location in the “West” rather than in the East.)

With the abrupt conclusion of Reconstruction in 1877, thousands of blacks made their way from the South to the West, heading for Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Indian Territory. Nell Irvin Painter, Norman Crockett, and other historians have demonstrated that these migrants were seeking escape from the onslaught of white racial violence in a period of escalating attacks and sought to resettle in a location where they could find economic opportunity, preserve their dignity, and make new homes (Painter 1992 [1977]; Crockett 1979). Some migrants headed directly for Indian Territory. Others made their way there after facing disappointments in Arkansas, and later in Oklahoma Territory, where white settlers refused to share the most productive lands and organized violent attacks to prevent blacks from homesteading. Many of

these migrants traveled in desperate circumstances: They were poor, hungry, and besieged by inclement weather as they walked what the historian Lori Bogle has called the “black Trail of Tears” (Bogle 1994, 169).

For black sojourners, Indian Territory shone like a beacon at the end of a long tunnel of racism and exploitation. Out of twenty-eight all-black towns that were founded in the region of present-day Oklahoma, twenty-four were located in Indian Territory on land allotted to former slaves of Indians, while only four were located in Oklahoma Territory in the aftermath of land runs (Carney 1998, 151). The majority of these Indian Territory towns were based in the Creek (or Muskogee) Nation. It is here, in the development of all-black towns in Indian Territory at the end of the nineteenth century, that the language of Indian Territory as the black paradise begins to emerge. It is also here that the few examples of blacks drawing connections between Africa and the Indian Territory can be found.

Black newspapers published in the Creek Nation prior to Oklahoma’s statehood, as well as a rare extant brochure published to attract new settlers to the all-black town of Red Bird, also in the Creek Nation, offer a glimpse into African American views of Indian Territory between 1880 and 1907. As the historian Kenneth Hamilton has pointed out, black towns were business ventures as well as cities of refuge, and newspapers and booster sheets were published by land speculators and town companies to promote the towns and attract new settlers. We can surmise, then, that many of the published representations of Indian Territory found in these sources were edited to project an especially positive view. Nevertheless, the theme of Indian Territory as a liberating space for black people that emerges in these sources is revealing. In a June 23, 1904 article in the black newspaper the *Muskogee Comet*, titled “Unequal Advantages in the B.I.T. [Beautiful Indian Territory],” one writer asserted that “the Creek Nation may verily be called the Eden of the West for the colored people.” Another article in the same newspaper observed: “The Indian Territory is the only place now in the South where the colored voter has a chance to exercise the right of franchise” (*Muskogee Comet*, July 14, 1904). The Kansas newspaper the *Afro-American Advocate*, based in the town of Coffeyville, adjacent to the Creek and Cherokee nations, also emphasized the attraction of Indian country, encouraging black people from the South to “come home, come home. . . . Come out of the wilderness from among those lawless lynchings and breathe the free air” (as quoted in May 1996, 225).

In keeping with this invitation, the town of Coffeyville adopted the slogan “Coffeyville—The Gate City to the Indian Territory” (May 1996, 225).

In 1905, the Red Bird Investment Company published a fifty-page brochure with photographs to boost its all-black town and encourage new settlement. The company’s representation of Indian Territory repeated and exaggerated the utopian image presented by black newspapers. The brochure begins: “A Message to the Colored man. . . . Do you want a home in the Great Southwest—The Beautiful Indian Territory? In a town populated by intelligent, self-reliant colored people?” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 1). The brochure later describes the physical location of Red Bird, insisting that “there cannot be found a more fertile location in the beautiful Indian Territory than the country tributary to Red Bird. . . . To ride through on the railway and watch the panorama unfold itself to your view, is like the realization of a cherished dream of a new home in the great and beautiful southwest” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 17).

In preparation for the publication of the brochure, the Red Bird Investment Company invited black professionals from across the Creek Nation and neighboring areas to comment on life in Indian Territory. Although the letters may have been edited, and negative letters are likely to have been rejected, the surviving testimonies open a window on the way that individual African Americans viewed and represented the Indian West. The first testimony, by the Reverend Jason Meyer Conner, who held a Ph.D. from Little Rock, Arkansas, and was an officer in the African Methodist Episcopal church, stated: “This is to certify that I have made a personal visit to the Indian Territory, and know it to be the best place on earth for the Negro” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 2). Dr. J. M. Davis, a physician from Muskogee, Indian Territory, reported that “this country is the Paradise for the colored man” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 36). And A. E. Patterson, an attorney-at-law also based in Muskogee, asserted:

In no section of this great land of ours do the colored people have a better opportunity to accumulate wealth and simultaneously develop individual characters and strong minds, than in Indian Territory. Here, where nature has so generously provided for the comforts of all people who are fortunate enough to have found their way to this earthly Paradise, every man is recognized according to his merit. (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 36)

These newspaper articles and letters represented Indian Territory not just as a region where African Americans could thrive politically and economically, but also as an idealized Promised Land. In two examples, the writings of black town settlers suggest that they imagined Indian Territory as a surrogate for an African home. In an attempt to discourage thoughts of emigration, the *Afro-American Advocate* posited that any black person “who can’t live in Indian Territory, need not go to Africa” (as quoted in May 1996, 225). Thomas Haynes, manager of the black town of Boley in the Creek Nation, compared his town to Egypt, claiming that Boley, like that ancient kingdom, was “an imperishable attestation of the power, might and intellectual genius of a race” (Crockett 1979, 46).

In imagining their paradisiacal home, black town settlers envisioned a place where Indians were necessary but peripheral. They were necessary because it was the Indian presence that differentiated Indian Territory from the states, and it was also the complex history between Indians and their former black slaves that had opened the door for African American settlement; they were peripheral because blacks located Native people at the margins of their new communities. Similar to Frederick Jackson Turner’s concept of an American frontier in which an Indian *influence* makes white Americans distinct, but Indian *people* must give way to white progress, the concept of a black Indian Territory transformed Indians into a vehicle for black identity formation and racial uplift. For, as Norman Crockett has observed, the founders and settlers of all-black towns in Indian Territory sought a place where, by showing the values of race pride, self-reliance, moral fortitude, and industry, they could demonstrate their fitness for equal inclusion in the broader U.S. republic. It is perhaps telling that in the black town of Clearview, located in the Creek Nation, the two social organizations were the Patriarchs of America for men and the Sisters of Ethiopia for women — Africa and America jointly invoked against the unspoken backdrop of Indian land (Crockett 1979, 31, 66).

Several letters in the Red Bird brochure suggested that Native people were or should be marginal in the black Indian Territory and repeated the value of having a town “for colored people alone” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 36). A. E. Patterson, the attorney quoted earlier, described the population of the Creek Nation for would-be black settlers, emphasizing its mixed-race character and implying the absence of Native people of unmixed heritage. Patterson wrote: “Our population

is largely cosmopolitan, being made up of Indians of mixed blood, educated colored and white people from the various States, the latter two races predominating” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 36). Mrs. J. Orlando Mitchell, the wife of an Indian Territory businessman, wrote:

The time of the painted Indian on the war path, and the desperado, has gone to make way for the income of civilization, culture and refinement. The Indian Territory of today is as free from the taint of the wild, barbaric life as is the city of Boston. . . . Social conditions here need have no terrors for those who contemplate making the Indian territory their home. (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 5)

Not until the last two pages of the Red Bird brochure is the Creek Nation, the site for Red Bird, acknowledged in any detail. In these final paragraphs, the brochure explains how black towns were founded on Indian land. But then, in a rhetorical erasure of Native presence, the brochure expresses the hope that all of Indian Territory will soon be dissolved into the new state of Oklahoma. The brochure ends with the call: “Soon there will be another star added to ‘Old Glory’ and it is then, when the Indian Territory is ushered into the sisterhood of States, the real boom will come. Get a start in time” (Red Bird Investment Company 1905, 25).

Despite the dream and rhetoric of black town members, turn-of-the-twentieth-century Indian Territory was not the ideal place that African Americans imagined it to be. Native residents viewed the stream of black settlers as intruders in their nations, and many blacks who had formerly been enslaved by Indians and had lived in Indian Territory for decades resented the new arrivals. As it would happen, the vision of Indian Territory as a haven for African Americans was not to be realized for former slaves of Indians or for new black settlers. As more blacks poured into the Indian nations, tribal governments began enacting de facto segregation policies, lumping together their former slaves with new black settlers. And when Oklahoma became a state in 1907, subsuming Indian Territory within it, the first act of the legislature was to pass Jim Crow laws segregating blacks from whites and Indians. What was arguably the last imagined space of refuge for blacks in the United States no longer existed. As one black Oklahoman, Clarence Love, remembered in an oral history: “My parents had decided to leave Muskogee, just like they had left other places before, because they had not

found the Promised Land that they expected” (Gates 1997, 141). Indeed, in the years that followed statehood, hundreds of African Americans in the former Indian Territory began a desperate attempt to emigrate to Canada, Mexico, and Africa, ever in pursuit of their “dreams of an elsewhere” (Holt 1999, 37).

### Seeing Red: Native America in the African American Imaginary

’Cause I’m goin’ to the Nation, goin’ to the territor’  
Say I’m bound for the Nation, bound for the territor’  
I got to leave here, I got to get the next train home.  
— BESSIE SMITH, “Work House Blues” (1998 [1930])

The words of Bessie Smith speak to an experience of coming and going, of nations and territories—a trajectory of experience shared by black and Indian peoples in the forging of a place called the United States. Indeed, this and other African American cultural and colloquial expressions suggest the importance to black experience of Indian presence, Indian relations, and Indian locales. African American resistance strategies, social worlds, and subjectivities have long been inflected by the idea of immigration to Native American spaces and of literal and metaphorical relationships with American Indian peoples, even as indigenous societies and cultures have been influenced by the arrival of these newcomers. In fact, one might argue that the very notion of a visionary politics in African American culture is inextricably tied to an idea (imaginary or realized) of Indian nations and territory as open and even marginal space, a psychic territory where black subjects find safety, solace, autonomy, and family. In essence, part of the idea of freedom in black experience includes the space for a powerful imaginary—a place where Indian presence is felt and often realized.

African Americans’ idealized images of Native lands and Native people are not without foundation. The black historians Carter G. Woodson and Kenneth W. Porter began documenting the fact of black and Native interrelations in the *Journal of Negro History* as early as the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> They found, as have scholars of both African American and Native American history who have pursued this question since, that Africans and Indians forged bonds with one another while jointly enslaved in the Americas and West Indies in the seventeenth century

and eighteenth century; that some enslaved African people successfully escaped to Indian countries; that major figures in black historical life have been both black and Indian in racial and cultural background; and that African American and Native American individuals and groups have joined forces to challenge European imperialism, colonialism, and slavery.

At the same time though, African American projections of liberation, economic success, community belonging, and ease of life onto Indian lands and peoples have not been free from logical flaws and exploitative gestures. Often these projections incorporate and reiterate broader American colonialist presumptions that Native lands and Native people, particularly Native women, should be made accessible to outsiders for purposes that do not serve the needs of American Indians themselves. The lyrics of “The Faking Blues” (1925) by Papa Charlie Jackson have just such a problematic effect when they express the following intention of the speaker: “Lord I’m going to the nation / Buy me an Indian squaw. / I’m going to raise me a family / Got me an Indian ma” (Jackson 1925). These lyrics not only suggest that racism was part and parcel of the interracial imaginary; such pronouncements also draw attention to the impossibility of safety, family, solace, or autonomy in a country where the twin forces of removal and slavery continue to bring the nation’s imaginary self in direct conflict with its lived history. In other words, we are well aware that words like “family” and “community” conjure a romance of past and present that can never be achieved or realized, as the dream constantly comes undone through the relentless presence of the real.<sup>11</sup> Black expressions of alliance with Indians often sideline the parallel history of adversarial relations between African Americans and Native Americans, in which Southern Indians owned blacks as slaves and black buffalo soldiers served in the U.S. military as a unit charged with crushing Native resistance movements and enforcing Native detention on reservations.

Although African Americans have met rejection as often as acceptance in Indian communities, and although African American and Native American historical relations have been characterized by a range of negative as well as positive interactions, a celebratory invocation of Indian peoples and places has persisted in African American cultural life. For if white America has been a wilderness of biblical proportions for African slaves and their descendants, Indian physical and relational landscapes have represented a new Eden for blacks, characterized by

the possibilities of transformation. As the African studies scholar Pablo Idahosa has observed, thoughts of Indian country have functioned like a salve for black people, who have been “hit with every sharp, jagged edge of every stick and sword” in North America (Idahosa 2000). Dispersed from their countries of origin and perpetually homeless on this continent, African Americans have imagined into being a Promised Land that is located both within and outside the national boundaries of the United States. In the realm of the black imaginary, then, the site of the Indian has been present, persistent, and paramount.

Indeed, the idea of and desire for connectivity with Indians and Indian spaces has found expression in a variety of African American cultural forms, including song, story, and visual art. In particular, the oral and written tradition in African America includes a predominant narrative of black and Native interrelations: that during slavery and the unpredictable climate of Reconstruction, blacks found safe haven, enlivened hope, and spiritual renewal by resettling in Indian territories and, whenever possible, becoming members of Indian families. This narrative has been expressed and re-expressed in multiple forms: in everyday speech acts in which African Americans assert Native ancestry; in children’s stories such as Angela Medearis’s *Dancing with the Indians* (1991), in which a black family makes a ritual pilgrimage to the Seminole Indian community that had sheltered their grandfather from slavery; and in the writings of African American authors.

The fiction of the Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist and feminist theorist Alice Walker, for instance, is punctuated by Native American characters and themes. Walker’s second novel, *Meridian*, about a young black woman’s personal and political awakening during the Civil Rights Movement, includes a meditation on the spiritual meaning of Indian lands for a displaced and often despised African American people. Her fourth novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, features mixed-race Afro-Native characters whose ancestry spans the South American and African continents and includes a chapter on the Seminole leaders Wild Cat and John Horse. Walker has suggested in her memoir, *The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart*, that her representation of Native American characters and themes is an essential expression of her own identity:

In Mississippi I began to crave arrowheads. It came upon me suddenly as the desire, years before, to write poetry. I hungered for the sight of them. I ached for the feel of them in my hand. . . . Our child has never known her mother

without arrowheads, without Native American jewelry, without photographs of Native Americans everywhere one could be placed. Craft and art and eyes steadied me, as I tottered on the journey toward my tri-racial self. Everything that was historically repressed in me has hungered to be expressed, to be recognized, to be known. . . . Indians are always in my novels because they're always on my mind. Without their presence the landscape of America seems lonely, speechless. (Walker 2000, 36–37)

Walker's articulation of the "lonely, speechless" landscape of an America without a Native presence challenges earlier and existing notions of the "vanishing" or, in the case of Indian women, "dead" Indian at the same time that it reveals a special, albeit problematic, attachment to Indian peoples and places.<sup>12</sup> The fiction of the Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison is likewise concerned with the emancipatory possibilities for African Americans of recognizing Native ancestry and nurturing relationships with American Indian people. Parallels between Indian Removal and African enslavement permeate Morrison's masterpiece, *Beloved*, in which the spirits of Indians violently removed from the Southern landscape join in the chorus of loss and pain with the baby ghost, Beloved, herself.<sup>13</sup> As the literature scholar Catherine Griffin has astutely observed, the representation of indigenous Americans has been a trope in African American imaginative expression because Indians might offer a homeland in place of the stolen Africa and extend the promise of ancestors in place of severed family lines (Griffin 2000, 214). Griffin explains that in a context in which "Black history in the U.S. is an endless tale of exile and alienation," images of Indians have become critical to the African American reinvention of self, family, community, and place (Griffin 2000, 162).

The foregoing discussion of black imaginings of Indians raises the question: How do Native Americans view African Americans, imagine blacks and black culture, and interpret the points of overlap between African American and Native American histories? Comparatively few Native intellectuals have taken up this subject matter in the past. Those who have—namely, the Powhatan-Renape scholar Jack Forbes, the Modoc-descended writer Michael Dorris, and the Laguna-Pueblo novelist Leslie Marmon Silko—have articulated theories that recognize the joint impact of European colonialism, slavery, and racial hierarchy on indigenous American and African American subjectivities, communities, and resistance strategies. Through his character Rayona in *A*

*Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Dorris indicates the complexities of Afro-Native “dual heritage” in a Montana Indian community that reproduces aspects of U.S. racial prejudice (Dorris 1988 [1987], 63). Silko introduces the prospect of cultural and spiritual fusion from the perspective of the African American character Clinton in *Almanac of the Dead*, writing: “From the beginning, Africans had escaped and hid in the mountains where they met up with survivors of indigenous tribes hiding in remote strongholds. . . . Right then the magic had happened: great American and great African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness within all people” (Silko 1991, 416). It is this vision of shared experience and joint creation that the Lakota artist Francis Yellow embraces in his piece that graces the cover of this book, a pictograph-like drawing of Africans entering indigenous American lands, titled, “First They Made Prayers, and They Sang and They Danced and Then They Made Relatives.” The work of Forbes, Dorris, Silko, and Yellow represent only a segment of Native interpretations of black and Indian relationships. There is much more to be said from the perspective of Native thinkers, and we hope to extend and invite that dialogue through the works collected here.

### Summary of Collected Essays

In the spirit of interdisciplinary openness and in the hope of fostering unexpected and productive dialogues, this book is divided into two loosely organized, nonchronological halves that cross disciplinary lines. Chapters 1–8 are primarily concerned with the themes of race, place, belonging, citizenship, and historical memory. Chapters 9–15 are particularly interested in explorations of presence, identity, and intimacy through narrative, performance, and visual art.

We begin with the evocative “A Harbor of Sense,” in which the veteran poet and literature professor Eugene B. Redmond conducts an introspective interview with the Creek poet and musician Joy Harjo (Mvskoke/Creek). Widely recognized for her many books of poetry, including *She Had Some Horses* (1983), *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* (1994), and *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems* (2002), Harjo speaks in the interview about becoming a musician, about the new musical form of “tribal jazz,” and about sources of inspiration, from a grade-school classroom to her saxophone-playing

grandmother and the history of black and Native shared traditions of music and dance.

In the first essay of the volume, “An/Other Case of New England Underwriting: Negotiating Race and Property in *Memoirs of Eleanor Eldridge*,” the literary and cultural studies scholars Jennifer D. Brody and Sharon P. Holland provide one of the first extended readings of Eldridge’s story. The memoir, first published in 1838 by the prominent Rhode Islander Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall, offers a window onto the complex metaphoric negotiations of African and Indian subjectivity in early-nineteenth-century New England. Brody and Holland return to the archive to investigate Eldridge’s maternal grandmother, Mary Fuller (reputed to be Narragansett), and to trouble the terms of such an investigation. What they find is a narrative that, although written by a white woman, engages the articulation of race, gender, and sexuality. As such, the piece proves illuminating for scholars of the era and area.

In “Race and Federal Recognition in Native New England,” the attorney Tiffany M. McKinney questions the impact of historical Afro-Native intermarriage on the makeup, identity, and federal categorization of certain New England Indian tribes. McKinney asserts that racial complexity within Indian kinship circles and citizenries has contributed to contentious debate within tribal communities. She takes as her point of focus the Eastern Pequot and Pautucket Pequot bands and the Mashantucket Pequot tribe of Connecticut and Rhode Island, which have encountered internal dissention and external criticism due to the presence of “phenotypically black” tribal members. In a survey of government regulations and legal cases that serves as an instructive overview of the intersecting racial and legal dimensions of federal tribal recognition, McKinney suggests that the United States’ history of federal intervention and recognition have contributed to tensions around race and belonging in contemporary Native communities. The result, McKinney posits, has been the construction of new tribal definitions of membership and citizenship that disenfranchise community members based on their racial categorization and physical appearance.

The next essays carry the historical debate about community boundaries, belonging, and citizenship out of New England and into the Indian Territory of present-day eastern Oklahoma, to which certain tribes of the Southeast were removed in the 1830s and 1840s. By focusing on the aftermath of black slavery in Indian nations, these three

authors import into Native locales key questions about the meaning of freedom and the practice of politics in post-bellum black life. The historian David Chang's essay, "Where Will the Nation Be at Home? Race, Nationalisms, and Emigration Movements in the Creek Nation," redirects the post-emancipation discussion to the meaning of nationhood for Creek Indians, Creek freedmen and women, and other Native peoples in late-nineteenth-century Indian Territory. Chang argues convincingly that the notion of the nation held a particular power for both black and Native communities. He then demonstrates the complexities and contradictions for these groups in claiming a national paradigm during a historical moment in which Native governments were under threat of dissolution by the U.S. government, Native tribes were excluding ex-slaves and mixed-race Afro-Native people from the national body, and both black communities and Native tribes were launching independent plans to emigrate to Africa, Mexico, and Canada in parallel attempts to find new homelands for their communities. In this exploration of national discourses and emigration projects, Chang shows how it was possible—and, indeed, consistent—for former slaves of Creek Indians to assert definitions of their community that embraced an Afrocentric nationalism, respected and identified with Creek nationalism, and implicitly opposed the racialized nationalist projects of the United States.

The historian Barbara Krauthamer continues this discussion in her essay, "In Their 'Native Country': Freedpeople's Understandings of Culture and Citizenship in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations." Krauthamer offers an overview of the experience of black slaves in the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes and an assessment of their forty-year struggle for the rights of citizenship following the Civil War. Rather than focusing on the slaves' formation of syncretic Afro-Indian identities, as some scholars of this era have done, Krauthamer explores the political life of these communities. She argues that in their attempt to define the meaning of freedom for themselves, former slaves focused on civic inclusion and the attainment of land in Indian Territory based on their history of cultural identification with Indian tribes. By tracing the shifting strategies that freedpeople engaged in, sometimes pressing for citizenship within their respective Native nations and at other times vying for citizenship within the United States, Krauthamer reveals a political conviction as well as a sense of peoplehood that was both linked to and separate from Native American tribal bodies.

The final essay in this trio, “‘Blood and Money’: The Case of the Seminole Freedmen and Seminole Indians in Oklahoma,” by the ethnic studies scholar Melinda Micco (Seminole/Creek), traces the history of black Seminole and Seminole Indian relations since the Seminole Wars and examines contemporary ramifications of this history — namely, the present-day court cases concerning civil rights and the disbursement of federal monies within the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. Micco’s work reveals the ways in which structures of military alliance and social organization that developed in the earliest moments of black and Seminole interaction continue to shape tribal politics and intertribal relations. She argues that while external factors — namely, American territorial expansion, European categorization and control of indigenous Americans and transplanted Africans, and the codification of racial identity through the concept of blood quantum — have been critical to the fragmentation of the Seminole people, internal structures and tensions underlie the conflicts between black Seminoles and Seminole Indians. Micco’s interpretation of the past and present state of Seminole politics is enlivened and complicated by interviews with black Seminoles collected over a ten-year period. These interviews, together with her historical research, lead Micco to conclude that black Seminoles and Seminole Indians have a connection that is enduring and a history that cannot be collapsed into the broader category of black Indian experience.

The historian Celia Naylor takes our study farther west in “Playing Indian: The Selection of Radmilla Cody as Miss Navajo, 1997–98.” Here Naylor explores Afro-Native identity claims and contestations through a case study of the 1998 Miss Navajo Nation contest. The winner of this cultural pageant was the singer Radmilla Cody, the daughter of a Navajo woman and African American man, whose right to reign was questioned by other Navajos. In dialogue with the scholars Rayna Green and Philip Deloria, who have written about the phenomenon of “playing Indian,” Celia Naylor begins her study by asking whether African American claims of Indian heritage are treated with greater skepticism by Native people than are European American claims. In addition, through a compilation of letters to the editor in the *Navajo Times* and personal interviews with Cody, Naylor traces the reception of the mixed-race Miss Navajo among Navajos both on and off the reservation. She finds that internal community dialogue about the relationships between race and nation, between race and culture,

and between blacks and Indians was multivalent and contradictory rather than singular and cohesive. She concludes, based on this finding, that the racial dilemmas highlighted through the Miss Navajo Nation contest are indicative of a new problem of the twenty-first century: not that of the color line itself as W. E. B. Du Bois portended, but rather, the indeterminacy of racial boundaries.

Deborah Kanter's "‘Their Hair Was Curly’: Afro-Mexicans in Indian Villages, Central Mexico, 1700–1820," concludes the first part of the volume by transporting questions about perceived difference and the dynamics of African acceptance into the understudied location of colonial Mexico. She traces the history of African and Indian relations within and across the borders of indigenous communities, addresses the central issues of how kinship lines and the racial categorizations and signifiers of Spanish colonial rulers affected African and Afro-Indian belonging in indigenous communities, and considers ways in which blacks and black Indians engaged in the act of "passing" as Indian to improve their status among Indians as well as before Spanish officials. Using land-tenure cases to illustrate the uneasy position of Afro-Mexicans in Indian pueblos, Kanter considers the complex negotiation of perceived ethnicity and status in colonial communities. She finds that the ambiguous position of Afro-Mexicans in colonial Mexico came from within and from without—that identity and identities were imposed by both Indian and colonial officials. For Kanter, only a study that recognizes the animated nature of identification can comprehend the early period of racialized relationships and subjects.

The second half of the book begins with an essay by the Native American studies scholar and cultural critic Robert Warrior (Osage), who focuses on the ever important late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In his essay, "Lone Wolf and Du Bois for a New Century: Intersections of Native American and African American Literatures," Warrior laments the facile comparisons that are sometimes made between Native American and African American experiences and calls instead for a careful method of conducting comparative work in the field of Native American studies. Offering this essay on the intellectuals W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles Eastman, Luther Standing Bear, and others as a possible model, Warrior constructs a comparative analysis of black and Native intellectuals and their views on racial uplift through education after first establishing the distinct turn-of-the-twentieth-century historical context for Native America. He concludes that while

oppositional discourses existed in both the African American community and the Native American community, these discourses took subtle and unexpected forms in the writings and oral expressions of Native people.

In “Native Americans, African Americans, and the Space That Is America: Indian Presence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison,” the literature scholar Virginia Kennedy offers an evocative, original reading of three of Morrison’s major works. In conversation with the literary criticism of R. Radhakrishnan, Renee Bergland, Sharon Holland, and others, Kennedy explores *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *Paradise* to trace the contours of a third space in which African American and Native American experience meet. She finds not only that this space is embedded in the landscape and an intersecting history of dispossession, but also that the American nation cannot be at peace until it fully owns the atrocities committed against African slaves and indigenous peoples. Toni Morrison, Kennedy argues, is a writer uniquely conscious of the lasting imprint of the past on the present and the critical importance of American Indian nations, spirits, and lands to African American remembrance and resistance.

Tamara Buffalo (Ojibwe) is one of several select visual artists whose work was exhibited at the Two Rivers Gallery in the 1999 Minneapolis-based Intermedia Arts series “Red and Black: Sisters and Brothers to the Bone.” In her personal essay reprinted here, “Knowing All of My Names,” Buffalo describes her journey of self-realization through the discovery of her Ojibwe birth family and African ancestry and through the eventual naming of contested aspects of her multifaceted self. She expresses both the pains and pleasures of embodying an identity that deviates from expected monoracial, monocultural norms. In her accompanying pieces of visual art, *A Blind I Can C* (mixed media) and *The Singer* (acrylic on canvas), Buffalo interprets stereotyped images of black and Native people in tandem and creates her own icon of personal renewal and cultural connectedness by embracing the image of the mask.

The performance artist and literary critic Wendy S. Walters provides a groundbreaking examination of two First Nations Canadian plays in her essay, “After the Death of the Last: Performance as History in Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and The Blue Spots*.” Placing performance at the center of her inquiry, Walters attempts to coin a new kind of performance theory that she terms “performance of history.” In

her fascinating effort, Walters asserts that “performances of history are didactic representations of past public events and human affairs that address the intricacies of the human experience typically not accounted for in written history or folklore.” Given the reshaping of colonial events through creative narratives, Walters argues, the very concept of “diaspora” for Indian and black peoples is substantially challenged and revised through performative work. Evaluating the work of the Native playwright Monique Mojica (*Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*) while bringing in the texts of the African American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks as a point of comparison, Walters draws connections and contrasts between Native and African American histories of racism and colonialism and collective and individual identities. Her essay makes a significant contribution to the field of performance studies by challenging prevailing ideas in performance theory while simultaneously offering persuasive explications of primary texts that illustrate the shifting landscape of the personal and the political.

The next essay, by the anthropologist Robert Keith Collins (Choctaw), is an ethnographer’s look at life-history interviews with Afro-Choctaws that draws out the critical themes of cultural acquisition, identity formation, and socialization. In “*Katimih o Sa Chata Kiyou* (Why Am I Not Choctaw)? Race in the Lived Experiences of Two Black Choctaw Mixed-Bloods,” Collins poses the following central question: What happens when understandings of social viability in U.S. culture are multifaceted: split between race and culture? After conducting a two-year study with Choctaws of multiracial ancestry, Collins discovered that many interviewees defined their own identity formation by recounting verbal interactions with their Choctaw grandmothers. Collins’s relentless analytical pursuit of this phenomenon redirects the accusation of the “Indian-grandmother complex” that is often hurled at mixed-race Afro-Native people who claim Native forebears and arrives at a new possibility for theories and practices of Indian identification (Deloria 1969, 3). In the end, Collins insists on a dynamic concept of the self — one in which processes of identity formation are interrelated and therefore not homogeneous; one in which “life strategies — like those from *sapoki anumpa* — are used to answer the question, “Who am I?”

Competing identities and nationalities converge in the provocative essay by the literary scholar ku’ualoha ho’omnawanui (Native Hawaiian), titled “From Ocean to O-shen: Reggae, Rap, and Hip Hop in

Hawai'i." From the perspective of a composer-poet, ho'omnawanui traces the growth of contemporary Hawaiian music in the last decade of the twentieth century, with a focus on its incorporation of Afro-diasporic musical forms and sensibilities. ho'omnawanui offers a cultural-studies critique that interprets the development and lyrics of the music, as well as the aims of its producers, and shows that hip hop and reggae are put to new artistic, social, and political uses within a Hawaiian context. "From Ocean to O-shen" includes a methodological mix of analyses of creative sound producers, audience response, and radio-station production to arrive at its primary conclusion. ho'omnawanui cautions scholars and consumers against a facile reading of contemporary cultures, especially where nations and borders are concerned. For this chapter, borrowing or sampling may or may not apply, as African and Native cultures move together and at the same time apart, on a simultaneous and parallel journey in which genre, language, and culture meet but do not melt.

In the short story, "Heartbreak," the poet and literary scholar Roberta Hill (Oneida) narrates the psychic life of losing and leaving as a woman witnesses her sister's disintegration after a painful breakup. As the narrator recalls, "She was balancing on the edge of catastrophe, unimaginable and deadening, the catastrophe of our colonization." "Heartbreak" is both poignant and humorous. It finds breath and life in the space between nations, peoples, marriages, and love affairs. Hill's narrative enfolds micro-fictive elements as it travels in the space of an afternoon but depends on lengthy histories, personal and national, to tell more than one story. As it mines the provocative boundary between stereotype and authenticity, "Heartbreak" provides another opportunity for literary scholars to explicate the connection between Indian and black peoples, especially in terms of gender. In the end, the women are "*bloka*, ready for anything, anything at all."

The concluding chapter is by Robert Warrior (Osage), whose epilogue reflects on issues raised by the collection — namely, the themes of place, loss, sadness, silence, ambiguity, instability, and the continual movement and transformation of blacks and Indians and their interrelations.

In the pages that follow, we have attempted to assemble an array of interdisciplinary contributions that illustrate the long history, as well as the cultural and political importance, of African diasporic experience in

Indian locales and of African and Native American intersectional lives. These scholarly and creative works investigate the permutations of historical interaction between Indians and blacks; the complex identities, cultural formations, memories, and aesthetic creations that arose out of those histories; and the reverberations of these historical exchanges and productions in contemporary African American, Native American and Native Hawaiian, and Afro-Native subjectivities, cultures, and communities. The historical chapters take up critical themes in African American studies and African diaspora studies in the context of Native American places, examining slavery, racialization, migration, displacement, the quest for belonging, the struggle for emancipation, and the battle for citizenship. The chapters of literary explication show the meaning of Indians in the African American imaginary, the intersectional nature of colonialism and racism in the Native American imaginary, and the contested terrain of Afro-Native narrative self-representation. The chapters on identity, both claimed and disclaimed, reveal the fluidity and complexities of Afro-Native subjectivities and performances thereof. The original fiction, visual art, and interpretations of contemporary music point the way toward establishing a new aesthetic capable of envisioning the transformation and even combination of seemingly disparate cultures. And all of these works explore conditions in which key issues in black experience confront similarly key issues in Native experience—namely, the designation and defense of a people and a homeland, the creation and protection of independent cultural ways, and the assertion of political dignity and autonomy.

### Notes

- 1 Springplace Mission Diary 1811 (McClinton, forthcoming).
- 2 Ibid. 1807.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid. 1816; letter dated July 22, 1806, Spring Place Letters, Cherokee Mission Papers, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, N.C.
- 5 Spring Place Diary, 1802, and letter dated July 22, 1806, both in Cherokee Mission Papers, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, N.C.
- 6 Springplace Mission Diary 1811 (McClinton, forthcoming); emphasis added.
- 7 For more on the enslaved black community of the James and Joseph Vann plantation of the Cherokee Nation (Diamond Hill), see Miles 2005; Perdue 1979.

8 The intellectual project of African American studies has been enriched by a revived transatlantic focus, which allows for comparative analyses of black populations, documents a vast array of survival strategies and cultural formations, traces retentions of Africanisms, and considers the cultural consistencies and inconsistencies that have made the peoples and cultures of the African diaspora cultural kin and at the same time strangers. But while de-centering the United States and adopting the particular paradigm of the black Atlantic has breathed new life, theoretical acumen, and political urgency into the field of black studies, it has also produced new invisibilities. The focus on the Atlantic Ocean diverts attention from other critical sites of cultural formation and exchange, such as the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and the lands of Latin America (Byfield 2000, 2001; Chrisman et al. 2000, 3; Kelley 2000, 33). In addition to overlooking black diasporic sites and experiences in these regions, the resurgent field of African diaspora studies has consistently neglected a salient location at the heart of the Atlantic world: indigenous lands, communities, and nations across the Americas. These Native American locales might be described as “third space[s]” of African diasporic displacement, as Michelle Wright (2004, 7) employs the term, which are the original homes neither of colonizing whites nor of captured blacks. Furthermore, just as the study of black experiences in locations as diverse as the United States and the Caribbean crosses and collapses national boundaries in keeping with a transnational, comparative frame, the study of black experiences in the Indian nations of the Americas crosses and collapses national boundaries. The populations and governments of Native America recognize themselves as separate peoples and independent nations and are recognized by the (post)colonial governments of the United States, Mexico, and Canada as distinct political entities and cultural bodies. As states within states, Native nations are prime locations for the study of the phenomenon that the historian Earl Lewis (1999, 5) has called “overlapping diasporas” or “dispersed communities,” in which black peoples who have undergone a series of displacements have created multifaceted cultures and identities.

9 It is also a goal of this book to expand the conversation about African and Native American interaction and exchange beyond the fields of American Indian history and ethnohistory and into the fields of African American studies and American studies. Much of the academic work on relations between African Americans and Native Americans published since the 1970s has been produced by scholars of American Indian history. Primary examples are Brooks 1998, 2002; Forbes 1993; Littlefield 1977; Merrell 1984; Perdue 1979; Saunt 2005; and Wright 1981.

Few major works of this recent body of scholarship originated with scholars of black studies, American studies, or comparative ethnic studies, with the notable exceptions of Brennan 2003, one of few texts that presents frameworks for the study of an Afro-Native literary tradition; Holland 1994; Katz 1986, a

foundational book in this field though geared to young adult readers; May 1996; Miles 2005; and Porter 1996.

**10** See Porter, 1932, 1933; Woodson 1920.

**11** Miranda Joseph (2002) offers a brilliant critique of “community.”

**12** For more on Native American themes and images in Alice Walker’s work, see Brennan 2003, esp. 31–32. See also Riley 2003.

**13** For more on Native American themes and images in Toni Morrison’s work, see Virginia Kennedy’s essay in this volume and Pasquaretta 2003.