

## A Provocation of The Modes of Black Indigeneity

*Culture, Language, Possibilities*

**ABSTRACT** This essay explores the meaning of the term Black Indigeneity (BI). Afro-Indigenous Studies scholar Kyle T. Mays asks, what is Black Indigeneity? How do scholars talk about it? What are its possibilities? Relying on a survey of recent scholarship, Mays argues that BI is largely understood as a form of Black Americans participating in settler colonial processes meant to erase and displace Indigenous peoples. He argues that we should look at BI as an analytic that African Americans have used to create belonging and continue to express cultures practiced throughout the African diaspora, adapted and transformed into a modern iteration of cultural expression. In this way, we should rethink how we view blackness and indigeneity as two separate entities, and explore how people of African descent create belonging on dispossessed Indigenous land. **KEYWORDS** African American, diaspora, Indigenous

### INTRODUCTION

In 2017, historian Robin D.G. Kelley wrote an essay, “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” for the *American Quarterly*. The special issue was dedicated to the legacy of the late anthropologist Patrick Wolfe and his last publication, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (2016). In his critical commentary, Kelley argues that Wolfe’s focus on North America and the Pacific ignores the African continent.<sup>1</sup> He draws this conclusion based on a passage where Wolfe distinguishes the history of Indigenous peoples in North America and the Pacific and Black people as they relate to settler colonialism and enslavement. Wolfe argues that settler colonialism was meant to erase Indigenous people in order to take their land and that African Americans were exploited principally for their labor.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani argued similarly in *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (2020), “Blacks have been governed by a regime of white supremacy, the struggle against which has been incorporated into the American sense of self—a fact demonstrated by the comfort with which racists cite King and other icons of civil rights.” Indigenous people in contrast, argues Mamdani, “have been governed by colonialism, which, if recognized, would destroy the American sense of self.”<sup>3</sup> Neither Wolfe nor Mamdani are abnormal in this

1. Robin D. G. Kelley, “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 2017): 267–76.

2. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 2.

3. Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2020), 41.

formulation. Indeed, noted Standing Rock Sioux intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. strongly asserted a similar line of thinking in his important work, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969).<sup>4</sup> As a result, generations of Indigenous intellectuals have spent decades drawing distinctions between Black and Indigenous peoples and their political goals, especially how they would belong in relationship to the US.

The assumption that African Americans' conception of belonging was exclusively about integration into US empire flattens Black history. It ignores Black radicals who sought to fundamentally transform US society and those who wanted to leave the US altogether. It also ignores people like Stokely Carmichael (later known Kwame Ture) who argued extensively that this land did not belong to him or any African descended person; it belonged to Indigenous peoples. Indeed, in 1974, at a meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota, Carmichael, expressing solidarity with the American Indian Movement argued, "Anybody who thinks seriously on behalf of the red man must deal with this truth. The land upon which we live, on which we inhabit, which we exploit—that land belongs to the red man. He must come first in any dealings with the land."<sup>5</sup> Black people have always used many methods to create and imagine home.<sup>6</sup> Carmichael might be an aberration in Black political thought, but it is an important one.

The assumption that Wolfe and Mamdani suggest reflects a larger trend within Black and Indigenous Studies, that Black people want to integrate into the US settler colonial state and Indigenous people want to be left alone. Kelley argues that this is problematic for a few reasons. First, "it presumes that indigenous people exist only in the Americas and Australia. African indigeneity is erased in this formulation because, through linguistic sleight of hand, Africans are turned into Black Americans."<sup>7</sup> Kelley asserts that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade "rips Africans from their homeland and deposits them in territories undergoing settlement and dispossession, but renaming severs any relationship to their land and indigenous communities."<sup>8</sup> Kelley goes on to discuss how colonialism impacted people of African descent who were kidnapped from their own Indigenous lands and how Europeans tried to erase their cultures and languages.

I want to use Kelley's critical response to Wolfe's conception of Black belonging in order to explore the meaning of "Black Indigeneity" as an analytic within Indigenous Studies and Afro-Indigenous Studies. I ask the following questions: What is Black Indigeneity? How do scholars define and use it? What are the limits and possibilities of 'Black Indigeneity'? But first, let me define Black Indigeneity (BI). For the purposes of this essay, Black Indigeneity concerns how people of African descent create belonging in

4. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 174.

5. Stokely Carmichael, "The Red and the Black," *Akwesasne News*, Winter 1975.

6. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 4. McKittrick argues that "black people have always used interdisciplinary methodologies to explain, explore, and story the world, because thinking and writing and imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres unsettles suffocating and dismal insular racial logics" (4).

7. Kelley, "The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native," 268.

8. *Ibid.*

the settler nation-state that is the United States.<sup>9</sup> By belonging, I mean how they connect to land, form community, and how they exist in relationship to the Indigenous people. Black Indigeneity is how African Americans have generated their sense of home within dispossessed Indigenous land. As Zoé Samudzi and William Anderson contend, “much of the identity production of Black people in the United States, both from descendants of enslaved Africans (African Americans) and otherwise, has stemmed from . . . an attempt to reconcile diasporic self with roots and a sense of African groundedness, a sense of home space.”<sup>10</sup> It is African descended people in the diaspora, who have a real or imagined connection to Africa; it is a desire to create belonging and make a reckoning with the past (and current) traumas, including racism and colonialism, caused by the transatlantic slave trade in the United States and other parts of the diaspora; it is about creating sovereign selves and asserting themselves as human. Black Indigeneity is how Black folks construct their belonging—this belonging has at least two components: composing belonging to place and finding freedom. It is through maintenance and production of culture that we can find the core elements of Black Indigeneity within African America. I also argue that Black Indigeneity explains how people of African descent conceptualize occupation in conflict with Indigenous claims to land. This latter point—how people of African descent construct claims to land in direct conflict to that of Indigenous peoples—dominates the discourse of Black Indigeneity.

Within Indigenous Studies, the conversation about Black Indigeneity centers on enslaved Africans and their descendants, and how they engage in settler colonial processes like European settlers. Black people are either erasing Indigenous peoples, attempting to replace them, or are outright settlers.<sup>11</sup> Even discussions of racialization within Indian Country ignore the reality of how race and racism shape the everyday lives of, for instance, Afro-Indigenous peoples. Still, as literary scholar Shona Jackson argues in *Creole Indigeneity*, “we must begin to address the ways in which, in the Caribbean and even within settler states like the United States that fit the dominant model, those brought in as forced labor (racialized capital) now contribute to the disenfranchisement of Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>12</sup> Jackson forces us to think critically about what it means to be Black (or Latinx, or Asian) on Indigenous land.<sup>13</sup> But what if we take seriously that those Africans who were Indigenous peoples stolen from their own places of home and forced to labor on dispossessed land, were actually Indigenous? Then, we must ask, when did Black

9. For analytical purposes, I am focusing only on the US, but Black Indigeneity surely exists within other parts of the Americas.

10. Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson, *Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2018), 24.

11. Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 54. See also, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–43.

12. Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3.

13. Maylei Blackwell, Flordalma Boj Lopez, and Luis Urrieta Jr., “Critical Latinx Indigeneities,” *Latino Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 2017): 126–37; and Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaii*, 1st edition (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

people lose their indigeneity? There is an undergirding assumption that they are settlers, or at least something else. How did they transform into being “Black” and no longer Indigenous? I would argue that elements of indigeneity exist within African American culture. Black Indigeneity as expressed within Black culture is not meant to dispossess or replace Indigenous people. Instead, it is meant to highlight the ongoing, even imagined connections to the African continent. Black Indigeneity is something that the discipline of Indigenous Studies must grapple with as we move forward, and it is an idea that theorists such as Sylvia Wynter have theorized.<sup>14</sup>

As we know, forms of cultural elements continue to persist among people of African descent.<sup>15</sup> It is here, in the realm of culture, what Sylvia Wynter calls the plantation, where African cultures persisted and continued to thrive, albeit in their new, pan-African, modern forms.<sup>16</sup> However, let me explain how scholars are writing about Black Indigeneity within Indigenous Studies.

### CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

The current scholarship related to blackness and indigeneity can be placed within broad categories, including Afro-Indigenous history, which includes studies that analyze the history of those who are of African and Indigenous ancestry. Afro-Indigenous Studies is a field of study that intersects the disciplines of Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, and explores the relationship between African descended peoples in the US, Native Americans, and those who are descendants of tribal nations or through the act of enslavement. For example, historian Tiya Miles has made significant contributions to expanding the field of Afro-Indigenous history. Historian Alaina Roberts’ recent book deals explicitly with the contradictions between indigeneity, freedom, and settler colonialism in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). However, even these important books tend to focus almost exclusively on the nineteenth century and might cover a little bit of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Scholars who conduct work in Black and Native Studies as distinct, but overlapping fields of study, do so with major foci on comparative dispossessions and how their experiences differ under settler colonialism and racial capitalism.<sup>18</sup> A notable, recent

14. Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diatrics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 72.

15. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 122.

16. Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (1971): 95–102.

17. There is a long list of scholarship within Afro-Indigenous Studies, but I will only list some recent ones. See, Alaina E. Roberts, *I’ve Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Sharon P. Holland and Tiya Miles, “Afro-Native Realities,” in *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. Robert Warrior (New York: Routledge, 2015), 524–48.

18. Manu Karuka, “Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination,” *Journal of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association* 3, no. 2 (2017): 77; Jodi A. Byrd et al., “Predatory Value,” *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-4362325>.

Jodi Byrd, “Variations under Domestication: Indigeneity and the Subject of Dispossession,” *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (June 2018): 123–41; Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein, “Introduction: On

standout is Tiffany Lethabo King's, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). In this important work, King argues that we should think of Black and Indigenous studies side-by-side as products of colonialism, and imagine new ways of conceptualizing these relationships.<sup>19</sup> Other recent works include the edited collection, *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (2020).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, a recent special issue on blackness and indigeneity, mostly from the lens of settler colonial theory in the *American Indian Studies Culture and Research Journal*, sheds light on how these connections operate.<sup>21</sup> These projects attend to the relationship between blackness and indigeneity, and significantly add to the work of Black Studies and Native Studies.

In literary studies, literary scholar DeLisa D. Hawkes argues that just like race is a social construction, so, too, is indigeneity. Therefore, she proposes “New Negro Indigeneity” as a response to “ancestral dispossession and white-settler colonialism’s debilitating effects on cross-racial and cross-cultural collaboration.”<sup>22</sup> This work adds significantly to the scholarship by attending to how Black Indigeneity and Afro-Indigenous relationships are represented in literature, especially during the Harlem Renaissance, including resurrecting the literary genius of Olivia Ward Bush-Banks.<sup>23</sup> These works are important for understanding Black and Indigenous relations. It is also important to excavate an understanding of how Black people view Native people in literature.

Although important contributions, these works still don’t theorize enough about how African Americans create Black Indigeneity. I want to offer another reading on Black Indigeneity, specifically through culture. In other words, what are the historical and political dimensions of Black people’s cultural productions that are unique to this particular geographic space? We must realize that there is land (or place, home, space, etc.) in the physical space, but there is also place in the form of a cultural and social production.<sup>24</sup>

Black Indigeneity can also be contentious when it collides with Indigenous ideas of land relationships. It is a concept that explores how Black people have created

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Colonial Unknowing,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (October 12, 2016), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633283>; Justin Leroy, “Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633276>; and Nick Estes and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “Examining the Wreckage,” *Monthly Review*, July 1, 2020, <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/07/01/examining-the-wreckage/>.

19. See Tiffany Lethabo King, “New World Grammars: The ‘Unthought’ Black Discourses,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016). See also, Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

20. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, eds., *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020). This is a fantastic collection of essays that cover politics, land, and popular culture.

21. See, Circe Sturm, “Introduction: Rethinking Blackness and Indigeneity in the Light of Settler Colonial Theory,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 43, no. 2 (May 1, 2019): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicrj.43.2.sturm>. A notable exception is Shanya Cordis’, “Settler Unfreedoms,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 43, no. 2 (May 1, 2019): 9–23, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicrj.43.2.cordis>.

22. DeLisa Hawkes, “Olivia Ward Bush-Banks and New Negro Indigeneity,” *MELUS: The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 105.

23. *Ibid.*, 107.

24. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

a relationship to land in settler nation-states. Black people claim that they are owed land because of their exploited labor. It is rooted in earlier Black Nationalist tendencies dating back to the nineteenth century. The argument further goes, “This society is based on our labor and we didn’t profit off of it. Therefore, we are here to cash our checks!” This logic assumes, by omission, that settler colonialism will continue and Native people don’t have a future. Because it centers Black relationships to land in the US, it is controversial to Indigenous people because they see it as erasing their relationship to land. Examples include the Republic of New Afrika, formed in May 1968. Those seeking a Black nation-state within the US wanted to claim the southern states as their own, which they argued the US owed them because of their exploited labor.<sup>25</sup>

A more recent example of Black Indigeneity and erroneous claims to land today are #ADOS, American Descendants of Slavery. Founded by Yvette Carnell a writer and media pundit and Antonio Moore a Los Angeles based lawyer, they believe that Black is not an adequate description to capture what they believe is the unique experience of the descendants of enslaved peoples. More than this, they argue that Black Americans deserve reparations for enslavement and the suffering during the Jim Crow era.

The ADOS are a movement consisting of a broad set of people who believe that those who are the descendants of slavery in the US deserve reparations. They are also explicitly anti-immigrant (Latinx or African) and believe that they deserve land. They write, “Codified by government and exploited by private actors, the creation of an ADOS underclass served as the financial engine of a nation that never recognized the debt it owed the group as a result. As such, the ADOS movement is underpinned by the demand for reparative justice in the making the group whole.” Furthermore, they contend, “through federally-supported, discriminatory practices like redlining, black presence literally made wealth disappear in communities, all while American whites—and more recently, immigrants—enjoy advantage in a land of apparently equal opportunity that was in fact manufactured on the back of black failure.”<sup>26</sup> They are correct to highlight the discrimination that has happened against African Americans as well as their inability to gain wealth. But the discourse around reparations is limited by the focus on payment directly from financial institutions or the federal government, or receiving land as compensation. How can we discuss reparations for African Americans without considering how we return land to Indigenous peoples? Do African Americans really want reparations under racial capitalism? Do we want to continue Indigenous land dispossession? I don’t have an answer to these, but it seems worth thinking about these forms of reparations side-by-side.

I now want to return to a brief analysis of how Black Indigeneity functions within culture. I frame this section by asking, what are the historical and political dimensions of Black people’s cultural productions that are unique to the US? There is a potential limitation of analyzing Black Indigeneity in this way. After all, perhaps any group might

25. Chokwe Lumumba, “Short History of the U.S. War on the R.N.A.,” *The Black Scholar* 12, no. 1 (1981): 72. See also, Edward Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 1–2. The RNA used the history of Indigenous genocide to construct how they belonged.

26. See, “About ADOS.” <https://ados101.com/about-ados> [accessed 21 March 2021].

claim, and indeed do claim, indigeneity because their ancestors were born here. It is important to analyze this contradiction in relation to history. The descendants of enslaved Africans did not come here voluntarily. As Malcolm X once stated, “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock. The rock was landed on us!” Most white people in general can look back to some particular European ancestry; African Americans cannot easily trace their African Indigenous roots. Furthermore, consider how, for example whiteness was constructed specifically through Indigenous dispossession and African enslavement.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, indigeneity is about land (or place, home, space, etc.) in a physical sense. However, indigeneity can’t only be about land; it must include cultural and social production.<sup>28</sup> It is within language and culture that we can find some of the elements of Black Indigeneity. Scholars have illustrated how Black Indigeneity is constructed through performances that seek to mock and at times reinforce stereotypes related to Blacks and Indigenous peoples. This is particularly true in cases such as the Mardi Gras Indians.<sup>29</sup>

I want to explore how Black women creatively construct geography through poetic possibilities and through deep study of people. Black feminist geographer Katherine McKittrick calls this a “poetic of landscape,” which she contends is composed of “theories, poems, dramatic plays, and historical narratives that disclose black women’s spaces and places.” It also consists of “an interdisciplinary and diasporic and analytical opening, which advances creative acts that influence and undermine existing spatial arrangements.”<sup>30</sup> Importantly, this form of possession is not rooted in a desire to own land. Here, I want to place in conversation literary genius Zora Neale Hurston and critical sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman. These two Black women are adept at illuminating how African cultures persisted well into the twentieth and twenty-first century through language and expression.

Zora Neale Hurston is well-known for her work as a writer and as an anthropologist. I consider her work a significant contribution to understanding the survival of African cultures, or Black Indigeneity, in the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> In 1934, literary giant and ethnographer Zora Neale Hurston published an essay, “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” She covers Black folklore, expression, dance, and language. She argues that Black expression is strong and has had a major influence of white culture and society. She also articulates some of what I would classify as the “modes of Black Indigeneity.” Here, she argues, “The Negro is a very original being. While he lives and moves in the

27. Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1716–21.

28. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

29. Ricardo Guthrie, “Embodying an Imagined Other Through Rebellion, Resistance and Joy: Mardi Gras Indians and Black Indigeneity,” *AlterNative* 12, no. 5 (2016): 565.

30. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), [xxii].

31. Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, “Telling Anthropology: Zora Neale Hurston and Gilberto Freyre Disciplined in Their Field-Home-Work,” *American Literary History* 4, no. 3 (1992): 464–88; Irma McClaurin, “Zora Neale Hurston: Enigma, Heterodox, and Progenitor of Black Studies,” *Fire!!!* 1, no. 1 (2012): 49–67; Helen A. Robbins, “The Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston: A Postmodern Writer Before Her Time,” *Arizona Anthropologist* 7, no. 0 (January 1, 1991), <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/arizanthro/article/id/393/>.

midst of a white civilization, everything that he touches is reinterpreted for his own use.” Hurston argues that Black people have “modified the language,” altered “food preparation,” adapted the “practice of medicine,” and “most certainly the religion of [their] new country.”<sup>32</sup> Hurston aptly spells out how food is an organic example of Black expression. Indeed, other scholars have shown how enslaved Africans brought methods of cooking with them and also food, which have survived in African descended communities today.<sup>33</sup> Hurston highlights another mode of Black Indigeneity: language. More specifically, she refers to Black English.

Black English, more commonly known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is an example of Black Indigeneity in the realm of culture. According to critical linguist Geneva Smitherman, “Black Dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression, and life in America.”<sup>34</sup> Smitherman further argues that enslaved Africans developed a pidgin that “involved the substitution [of] English for West African words, but within the same basic structure and idiom that characterized West African language patterns.”<sup>35</sup>

We see Black English everywhere. Hip Hop has played a monumental role in expanding the language.<sup>36</sup> Corporations use it in their advertisements. People of all races and ethnicities at least attempt to use it. This has included minstrel shows, which were one of the earliest forms of popular culture in the US and defined early Hollywood films. Hip Hop culture remains an integral part of contemporary youth culture and is used across social media platforms. Black English and other forms of patois and creole languages exist throughout the African diaspora.

If language and food are modes of Black Indigeneity, what are other modes? How else can we understand the production of Black Indigeneity? We should continue to extrapolate the many possibilities of how Black Indigeneity is expressed in African American and diasporic contexts. I want to reiterate the limits of unpacking Black Indigeneity

32. Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 86.

33. See, Diane M. Spivey, *The Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook: The Global Migration of African Cuisine* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

34. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 2.

35. *Ibid.*, 5. She also argues that this language developed in order to communicate with whites but also other African ethnic and tribal groups, 7. For a comprehensive analysis of the development of Black English, see John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (New York: Wiley, 2000). One of the first scholars to document Black English is Lorenzo Dow Turner. He was the first Black linguist to study the Gullah Geechee language. See, Lorenzo Dow Turner, Katherine Wyly Mille, and Michael B. Montgomery, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002). See also, part I, “origins and historical perspectives,” in Sonja Lanehart, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

36. See, Geneva Smitherman, “The Chain Remain the Same: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation,” *The Black Scholar* 28, no. 1 (1997): 3–25; H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006). Hip Hop Nation Language is Black English in a modified form, which people all over the world have adopted.

within culture. We might suggest that Black Indigeneity is similar to European immigrants and how they created the US as their home. Even when European immigrants weren't considered "white," they created their identity based on the fact that they weren't Black.<sup>37</sup> Black people can reproduce ideas of settler colonialism and engage in settler colonial processes. However, the persistent possessive investment in whiteness today remains the key site through which property and power are defined, and what constitutes citizenship.<sup>38</sup> Whiteness is also tied to the accumulation of capital in a way that blackness is not.<sup>39</sup> Black Indigeneity therefore is how Black Americans produce culture and maintain the cultural elements that their ancestors brought with them in spite of enslavement.

### POSSIBILITIES: THE FUTURE OF BLACK INDIGENEITY

What is the future of Black Indigeneity? Storytelling between Black and Indigenous peoples is important. A significant contribution to understanding blackness and indigeneity is the work of Dark Laboratory. Co-founded by Tao Leigh Goffe and Jeffrey Palmer (Kiowa), these intellectuals and creators ask, "How is storytelling a mode of redress, recitation, and potential healing?" Dark Laboratory examines "the intersection between stolen life and stolen land" as well as "embodied modes of storytelling in the experience of the Indigenous Americas and Indigenous African traditions."<sup>40</sup> Dark Laboratory does important work in understanding Black Indigeneity, which leads to my second point.

One of the central points we must address in this research is to think besides and at times beyond the Five Tribes as well as the Wampanoag and Pequot. The experience of the Five Tribes and the Freedmen continue to dominate scholarship and public discourse as it relates to Afro-Indigenous history and belonging. In surveying new avenues of Black Indigeneity, we must think about the relationship between Black Indigeneity and diaspora. We must also consider how Africa figures into the discipline of Indigenous Studies.<sup>41</sup> To make it plain, where is Africa in Indigenous Studies? How do forms of indigeneity function within the African diaspora? These questions create more questions such as, at what historical moment can a group of people claim indigeneity and who can make land claims? Thus, a focus solely on indigeneity as one's relationship to land can remain problematic if it ignores previous group claims.

37. David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), 13–14.

38. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 3.

39. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 3–4.

40. Tao Leigh Goffe and Jeffrey Palmer, "Dark Laboratory," <https://www.darklaboratory.com/>. [Accessed 21 March 2021].

41. One recent example is, T. J. Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal: Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in Southern Africa* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2019). Other examples include, Vincent O. Nmehielle, "Indigeneity in Africa," *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, vol. 30., 2.

To be clear, discourses of indigeneity on the African continent have developed differently than that which developed in the Americas and the Pacific. Indigeneity in the US and the Pacific developed as responses to settler colonialism and imperialism. On the African continent, indigeneity was adopted “in response to the policies adopted by independent, post-colonial African states.”<sup>42</sup> African governments were more concerned with nation-building than giving certain ethnic groups rights. Indeed, in important work on the Declaration of Indigenous Rights (DRIP), which represents the larger trend within Indigenous Studies, African Indigeneity is excluded as something that is post-colonial, not Indigenous.<sup>43</sup>

We must also address the scholarship of the African Diaspora and how Black thinkers create forms of maroon communities as an attempt to revitalize from scratch an African sense of home.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps we might even conclude, as Mahmood Mamdani argues using post-apartheid South Africa as an example, that we should reframe “political identit[ies] so that formerly opposed identities could live together in the new political community. This is the heart of decolonizing the political.”<sup>45</sup> Reimagining identities and belonging under the direction of particular tribal nations’ protocols could be ideal. Instead of looking at Black Indigeneity as a deficit, as a practice meant to aid in the destructive methods of settler colonialism, we might also consider its potential for Black and Indigenous co-liberation, and its possibilities in the aftermath of settler colonialism and white supremacy. ■

42. Michaela Pelican and Junko Maruyama, “The Indigenous Rights Movement in Africa: Perspectives from Botswana and Cameroon,” *African Study Monographs* 36, no. 1 (March 2015): 51.

43. Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

44. Beatriz Nascimento, “The Concept of Quilombo and Black Cultural Resistance,” trans. Christen Smith, Archie Davies, and Bethânia Gomes, *Antipode* 0, no. 0 (2021): 1–38. These scholars translated Nascimento’s work from Portuguese to English. She who is an early Black Brazilian feminist who theorized quilombo as “African villages where the Black population took refuge to pine after their motherland” (22). She further argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries quilombos were “a free territory dedicated to African cultural practices . . . and enacted armed resistance to the slavocratic regime.” By the twentieth century, “it is principally an ideological form that quilombo enters the twentieth century” (25).

45. Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native*, 195.