read the books I review in this essay throughout the summer of 2015, right after I finished teaching a writing course at a tribal college on the Navajo Nation where I have periodically taught and researched over the last several years. The topics my students chose to write about offer a snapshot of key concerns facing the Navajo Nation today: the environmental impact of uranium mining on Diné lands; mental health issues on the reservation; the experiences of LGBT youth in Diné Christian communities; Navajo Nation police responses to domestic violence; and the challenges of economic development in the reservation’s “checkerboard” area, where federal allotment policies have resulted in patchwork patterns of tribal landholdings. All of these issues relate in one way or another to

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the historical legacy and persistent structures of ongoing US settler colonialism. As writing studies scholars have been asserting for some time now, the locations from which we compose shape the meaning we make. At this point in my scholarly career, I often find myself reading, thinking, and writing from the complex location of that Diné College branch campus in Crownpoint, New Mexico.

As I have sought to understand the rhetorical exigencies Diné College students and their communities face, I have become increasingly aware that all rhetorical situations in the United States are, by dint of their location, part of the “settler colonial ‘situation’” (Veracini, “Introducing” 5). As comparative historian Lorenzo Veracini observes, settler colonialism functions in part by seeking to render this situation invisible. It “covers its tracks and operates toward its own supersession” (3) by characterizing settlement as a past event rather than a persistent structure (see Wolfe), ignoring or denying continued Native presence, and obscuring the reality that both settlement and Indigenous resistance are ongoing. This means that failing to recognize the settler colonial situation—even in otherwise critical conversations about race, gender, sexuality, class, and other forms of structural oppression in the United States—is inadvertently participating in the very elisions, evasions, and selective remembering that perpetuate settler colonialism in the twenty-first century (Byrd). It was from this perspective that I encountered the four scholarly works I was invited to review here.

Each of these books is an impressive intellectual project motivated by commitments to social justice. Although the studies differ in subject matter, methods, and historical and geographical location, the authors share a common concern with the relationships between culture, place, power, and rhetoric. While there are many ways these books could be put in conversation, I chose to do so “from Crownpoint”: with the words of Diné College students fresh in my mind, and the insights of settler colonial theory informing my understanding of what was—and was not—being addressed. As I read each book, I paid attention to how the author framed the social justice issues at the heart of his or her analysis, with a particular eye toward the extent to which Indigenous presence and the structures of settler colonialism were rendered visible. I offer the resulting readings not so much as critique of these studies, but rather to show how explicit attention to the settler colonial situation might inform understandings of the relationships between rhetoric, writing, and structures of oppression in the United States, whether or not one’s work focuses primarily on Native American issues.

You Can’t Padlock an Idea

In You Can’t Padlock an Idea: Rhetorical Education at the Highlander Folk School, 1932–1961 (University of South Carolina Press, 2014), Stephen A. Schneider presents a
detailed historical account of three decades of rhetorical education at Tennessee’s Highlander Folk School. Founded in 1932, Highlander was an adult education center dedicated to addressing regional poverty conditions, supporting the Southern labor movement, and, in its later years, furthering civil rights activism. Responding to the school’s involvement with leftist political causes—particularly desegregation—the state of Tennessee raided Highlander in 1959, and after two years of failed legal contest, the folk school closed its doors. The title of Schneider’s book is a reference to founder Myles Horton’s statement as Highlander’s facilities were shuttered: “You can padlock a building, but you can’t padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea. You can’t kill it and you can’t close it” (170). Through careful archival research, Schneider traces the development of the Highlander idea of education for democratic social change grounded in the experiences, cultural resources, and goals of local communities. As Schneider persuasively argues, “We can—and should—understand the Highlander idea as, among other things, a theory of rhetorical education” (171).

In Schneider’s analysis, this theory had three key components, all of which contributed to the construction of what he, following William Gammon, calls “collective-action frames” (11). First, Highlander invited students to undertake collaborative rhetorical activities that enabled them to develop collective identities and experience firsthand the possibilities of democratic deliberation. Second, the school encouraged students to reframe their own experiences as social problems that could be changed through collective action. Finally, Highlander promoted a model of democratic social change in which education itself played a transformative role in establishing regional collective-action frames and fostering social movements. Over time, Highlander came to embrace a highly localized pedagogical approach in which rhetorical education began with the experiences and self-identified problems of students, building on their “local knowledge” (16) and “indigenous” cultural and rhetorical resources (11) as the basis for collective action.

You Can’t Padlock an Idea focuses on the development of Highlander’s theory of rhetorical education across four areas of activity: drama, journalism, literacy education, and music. Schneider takes great care to situate the school’s evolving curricula in these domains in historical, political, and regional context. Taken together, these examinations show the long arc of Highlander’s activist trajectory. The school began by developing rhetorical resources to support Southern labor movements during the New Deal and ultimately played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement, supporting literacy education as a form of community organizing and contributing to the emergence of freedom songs as a key rhetorical resource. In each chapter, Schneider reflects on what Highlander’s experiences and innovations can teach us about rhetorical education for social change.

There is much to admire about You Can’t Padlock an Idea. As the field’s first book-length study dedicated entirely to the Highlander Folk School, it makes an
important contribution to our growing interest in locally situated rhetorical education (see Gold), and Schneider’s focus on nonformal adult education broadens this historiographical project in useful ways. The study also sheds new light on social justice pedagogies prior to figures like Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, both of whom were influenced by Horton. As Schneider observes, the Highlander idea—developed through decades of experimentation in the school’s residential and field extension programs—differs in revealing ways from classroom-based critical pedagogies:

Highlander staff determined early that their most successful programs were those that attempted to begin where students were already—at the union level, the picket line, the freedom march. Far from engaging in ideological critique, Highlander staff attempted to help students develop symbolic repertoires that built on the knowledge they already had. (174)

Thus, the Highlander idea anticipates more recent discussions about the value of respecting and building on the funds of knowledge within students’ own communities, a principle that has been foundational to theories of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris). Schneider’s work helps us see how such pedagogical orientations have contributed to community-based collective action.

Yet, as I read You Can’t Padlock an Idea “from Crownpoint,” I found myself thinking about what wasn’t addressed in its discussions of locally situated social justice education foregrounding “indigenous” rhetorical resources: actual Indigenous people and the particular injustices of settler colonial dispossession in the Southeastern United States. Highlander’s facilities in Monteagle, Tennessee, were within the homelands of the Cherokee, the majority of whom were removed to what is now Oklahoma through displacement and ethnic cleansing in the early decades of the nineteenth century. However, many Cherokee individuals and communities—including the ancestors of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, just over the Tennessee-North Carolina border—resisted removal and remained in the mountains (Finger). These communities would have been among those experiencing the Depression-era poverty conditions Highlander was founded to address.

You Can’t Padlock an Idea includes no discussion of how the region’s Indigenous history influenced—or, perhaps, was overlooked by—Horton and other Highlander staff. This could be a productive line of inquiry, particularly given the school’s early focus on supporting the Southern labor movement, which was never as successful as activists hoped. Some have argued that the limited gains of labor movements in settler states may be related to ideologies surrounding the availability of land (Veracini, Settler Colonialism). Likewise, such inquiry might offer additional insight into Highlander’s role in the Civil Rights Movement: as Indigenous critical theorist Jodi Byrd observes, “[S]lavery cannot be understood separately from the colonization and theft of Indigenous lands that provided struggles for freedom their staging ground” (12).
The important role played by Highlander teacher Zilphia Horton, whom Schneider describes as being of “mixed Spanish and Native American heritage” (56), in the emergence of freedom songs like “We Shall Overcome” offers one promising possibility for investigation. Finally, Schneider gives no indication of whether and how Native communities in the region participated in Highlander’s activities as students. While the evidence may simply not exist in the archive, acknowledging that absence might help us understand the extent to which Highlander’s social justice frameworks were operating within settler colonial logics. Indeed, Schneider’s repeated use of the term “indigenous rhetorics” to refer to the practices of non-Indigenous communities in the Southeast signals the discursive erasure of Indigenous histories and ongoing Native presence in the region. Perhaps future scholarship on the Highlander Folk School that builds on Schneider’s foundation will examine the extent to which Indigenous people contributed to (or were ignored by) this experiment in rhetorical education for democratic social change.

**Del Otro Lado**

In *Del Otro Lado: Literacy and Migration across the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), Susan V. Meyers offers an in-depth portrait of the transnational literacy experiences of students migrating between rural Mexico and the United States. Meyers draws on several sources of data, including archival research in Mexico and ethnographic fieldwork in the Michoacán community of Villachuato and in Marshalltown, Iowa, where many migrant families from Villachuato work in a local meatpacking plant. She provides a much-needed examination of the changing roles of literacy in the “cyclical transnational migration culture that moves children back and forth—both geographically and metaphorically—across the U.S.-Mexican border in both directions” (3).

The exigence for Meyers’s study is the “crisis rhetorics” about migrant students in US schools currently shaping public discourse. Framing her analysis through critical literacy studies, Meyers characterizes these rhetorics as “literacy crisis vs. immigration crisis,” in which longstanding patterns of moral panic about academic achievement in a context of expanding educational access collide with an impulse to “protect” borders, jobs, and national identity against a perceived onslaught of immigrants (21). These tensions, she argues, are the most recent iteration of an ideological entanglement that has existed for some time. “[L]iteracy and immigration are,” Meyers asserts, “profoundly intertwined, and have been throughout much of the history of our nation” (21). She disrupts these crisis rhetorics through a close examination of what we might call “literacy in transnational American lives”—the American, in this case, being hemispheric. This examination foregrounds the shifting political, economic, social, and cultural contexts in which Villachuato residents
have encountered literacy from the Mexican Revolution to the present moment of transnational mobility.

Throughout Del Otro Lado, Meyers challenges discourses that attribute the so-called achievement gap to Mexican-origin students “not caring” about education. Countering both US and Mexican educators’ misconceptions of these students and their families, Meyers argues that Villachuato residents are “deeply invested in choices related to their children’s future” (5) but also highly aware of the disjunctions between the promises of education and the social and economic realities of their lives. Meyers calls the dominant ideological orientation the literacy contract, which “promises that those students who subscribe to the demands—both physical and ideological—of formal education will be rewarded with access to upward social and economic mobility” (22). However, as Meyers documents in compelling detail, this contract does not always deliver on its promises. In rural Mexican communities like Villachuato, nearly all labor is agricultural. Curricular materials developed in the capital are often irrelevant to students’ lives, and teachers frequently emphasize literacies that are disconnected from local activities, concerns, and values. Many Villachuato residents reject the delayed gratification demanded by the literacy contract in favor of the more immediate economic benefits of migrating to the United States.

Thus, Meyers argues that Villachuato residents’ stance toward literacy is intuitively rhetorical. That is, “they survey both their context and their resources (i.e., their available means) in order to adopt a strategic stance toward the demands of the literacy contract” (22). They selectively enact literacies in specific contexts for their own purposes, “accepting those aspects of formal education they find useful and leaving the rest” (151). While Villachuato residents have a clear sense of the parameters of those choices in Mexico, changing stakes of the literacy contract in the United States (i.e., the promise of greater economic rewards at the cost of greater assimilation to US culture and values) can create tensions between home and school that leave migrant students unsure about how to position themselves. However, contrary to the views of educators on both sides of the border, who often perceive migration as disruptive to education, Meyers finds that “migration is the strongest catalyst to literacy gains that currently exists in the extended Villachuato community” (18). Indeed, many migrant families view their children’s education as a form of prestige, a reward for their hard work and sacrifices—an end in itself, rather than a means. Thus, Meyers argues that migration has become what Deborah Brandt calls a sponsor of literacy, with all the social, economic, and ideological complexity that term implies.

As a counter to the many studies of Mexican-origin students that focus entirely on their experiences in the United States, Meyers’s work is groundbreaking. It not only enriches our understanding of the complexities of the history and current status of literacy education in rural Mexico, but it also demonstrates how transnational
migration is changing literacies on both sides of the border. This has important implications for how we conceptualize literacy in an era of increasing economic globalization and human migration, and Meyers’s study is a testament to the value of multilingual, transnational research (see Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue). Moreover, her concept of the literacy contract and the rhetorical nature of literacy are useful theoretical contributions, even for contexts that are not overtly transnational.

Another strength of Del Otro Lado is its attention to the history of colonialism in Mexico. As Meyers points out, casting Indigenous people as illiterate has long been a rhetorical strategy of colonizing powers, and even after the Mexican Revolution, literacy campaigns emanating from the country’s urban centers have often “been at odds with the needs and practices of indigenous and rural communities” (31). This history has shaped national education policy as well as literacy experiences in communities like Villachuato, whose residents are descended from displaced Indigenous people forced to labor on Spanish haciendas. Meyers remains admirably attentive to these issues throughout her ethnographic observations and archival research in Mexico. As I read the book “from Crownpoint,” however, her extensive discussion of colonialism in Mexico raised some unanswered questions about colonialism on, well, el otro lado.

While Meyers alludes at several points to US imperialism toward Mexico, she gives scant attention to the history of settler colonialism within the United States; she persistently refers to US colonialism in the past tense and makes no mention of twenty-first-century Native American communities. However, an awareness of the settler colonial situation in the United States and how it differs from Mexican colonial experiences might offer additional insight into the structural oppressions and immigration-related crisis rhetorics Meyers examines. Veracini offers a helpful shorthand for understanding the difference between colonial and settler colonial logics. Colonialism (or, for clarity’s sake, exploitation colonialism) says to Indigenous people, “You, work for me.” Settler colonialism, on the other hand, tells Indigenous people, “You, go away” (“Introducing” 1). In other words, exploitation colonialism seeks to control Indigenous labor, extractive resources, and markets, while settler colonialism wants Indigenous land and consequently seeks to extinguish Indigenous presence, physically and/or rhetorically. These distinct historical formations lead to different political structures and ideologies regarding immigration and the status of “exogenous others”—those who are neither Indigenous nor deemed eligible for citizenship in the settler state (Veracini, Settler Colonialism).

Settler colonialism would seem to be particularly relevant when discussing the migration of Indigenous and Indigenous-descended peoples across borders demarcating different colonial formations in the Americas. Meyers states at several points that Indigenous knowledges, literacies, and histories of resistance to domination are part of the legacy Villachuato migrants bring to their negotiations of literacy. This
acknowledgement suggests several questions. How are these migrants positioned as Indigenous-descended people who are also an exogenous source of labor within the US settler state? How are literacy ideologies operating within different colonial formations on both sides of the border, and how does that inform migrants’ rhetorical enactments of literacy? *Del Otro Lado* makes an important contribution to emerging transnational frameworks for critical literacy studies. A valuable next step might be accounting for the reality that, when the United States is involved, the ideological and economic structures through which transnational literacies circulate are, among other things, settler colonial in nature.

**Rhetoric in American Anthropology**

In *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), Risa Applegarth offers a fascinating historical study of American anthropological genres during the 1920s and 1930s. Applegarth calls her methodology “rhetorical archaeology,” which she defines as a “research practice [that] understands genres as material instantiations of a community’s norms, values, and priorities and investigates genre change to unearth and envision the prior life of a community” (175). Applying this approach to genres produced during anthropology’s period of rapid professionalization between the world wars, Applegarth complicates evolutionary narratives about the ascendance of the ethnographic monograph. Through her recovery of alternative anthropological genres from this era, many of which were authored by women and scholars of color, she reveals the power dynamics that gave rise to the ethnographic monograph, as well as forgotten forms of textual resistance to its ideological underpinnings.

The discipline of anthropology emerged in the late nineteenth century, and, as Applegarth explains, its “project—to construct a full account of human history—seemed to expand each year as colonial enterprises and geographical exploration extended the territory under European and American scrutiny” (25). From the beginning, the field was deeply intertwined with colonialisms, and many of its earliest practitioners were either official colonial agents themselves or directly supported by colonial power structures. During these years, anthropology was also remarkably eclectic and open to contributions from different sources, including women, people of color, and amateurs. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, the field became an increasingly academic enterprise, and, particularly after World War I, it sought to establish itself as a professionalized discipline.

This effort included shedding its amateur reputation, developing established professional pathways/gateways in the form of graduate programs, and erecting barriers to participation by producing what Applegarth calls “rhetorical scarcity,” or “a manufactured situation of intense and increasing constraint within a genre that
significantly restricts rhetors’ access to key rhetorical resources” (29). For anthropologists, that process included codifying methodological expectations for extensive (and often expensive) fieldwork, as well as developing increasingly specialized discourses that aligned as closely as possible with the natural sciences. It also involved demarcating a domain of inquiry over which the field would assert its disciplinary authority. Applegarth observes, “As American anthropology professionalized, the monograph genre performed normalizing functions, stabilizing the status of anthropologists as knowledge-making authorities over the Native and worldwide indigenous populations they positioned as their objects of study” (31). In short, the ethnographic monograph became increasingly narrow, increasingly “scientific,” and increasingly important for gaining membership in the profession. These rhetorical constraints produced a particular kind of colonial gaze.

After examining the emergence and functions of the ethnographic monograph, Applegarth turns to three alternative genres that also emerged during the interwar period: fieldwork autobiographies, folklore collections, and ethnographic novels. Each of these genres, she argues, offered distinct epistemic and rhetorical affordances that the ethnographic monograph did not, particularly for women and scholars of color, who were being systematically excluded from professional networks, education and employment opportunities, and scholarly authority. Those affordances included the opportunity to assert professional identities and expertise on their own terms, as was the case for Ann Axtell Morris, Gladys Reichard, and Ella Deloria (Yankton Dakota), whom Applegarth discusses at length. These alternative genres were also a means of reaching a wider—often public—audience. This was important for financially struggling scholars like author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, as well as for anthropologists like Reichard who sought to shape public policies toward Native Americans.

Applegarth argues that these alternative genres also enabled their authors to circumvent the objectifying, essentializing, and depersonalizing conventions that were coming to dominate the ethnographic monograph. Fieldwork biographies and folklore collections enabled women like Reichard, Hurston, and Deloria to write themselves back into the ethnographic scene as active participants shaping the interactions they were recording. These genres also enabled their authors to present informants as individuals sharing stories within dynamic social, cultural, and performative contexts, and to situate studies within actual historical time and place, rather than the mythical ethnographic present that the dominant monograph genre seemed to demand. As Applegarth observes, the best examples of these alternative genres presage the critical reexaminations of ethnography that emerged half a century later, when postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial theorists began challenging the field’s scientistic notions of objectivity and political neutrality.
Rhetoric in American Anthropology is a remarkable study, one that makes innovative use of rhetorical genre theory to contribute to our understanding of anthropology’s emergence as an academic discipline. The concept of rhetorical scarcity is a useful addition to our critical toolkit, and although she might have acknowledged that the field of archaeology has its own colonial baggage, Applegarth’s methodology offers an exciting way to think about making knowledge through the generic “pottery shards” communities leave behind (175). Furthermore, her study sheds light on the history of a genre that has become increasingly important in our own fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. While ethnography has largely moved on from the scientism of the decades Applegarth examines, scholars responding to recent calls for more ethnographic research into culturally situated rhetorical practices (Powell et al.) might reflect on the genre histories—and genre alternatives—that she presents. This will enable us to learn from a wider range of ethnographic writers, including women and scholars of color who have been excluded from the canon, and perhaps avoid some of the ideological pitfalls of ethnography’s history.

Throughout Rhetoric in American Anthropology, Applegarth is careful to foreground the emerging field’s complicity in colonialisms. While anthropologists have been making similar self-critiques for decades, Applegarth’s use of rhetorical genre theory offers new perspective on how that complicity was both enacted and resisted textually. Because this is such an important scholarly contribution, I would have appreciated greater attention to the distinct historical formations of exploitation and settler colonialism, particularly in a book that focuses specifically on American anthropology. Throughout most of her study, Applegarth uses the term “colonialism” to refer interchangeably to both European colonial activities that informed British and French anthropology—most of which would be considered exploitation colonialism—and US settler colonial efforts to contain, dispossess, and/or extinguish Indigenous peoples as sovereign entities in North America. (In three places in the text, Applegarth does use the term “settler colonialism,” but she neither explicitly defines it nor gives any indication of her reasons for using the term in those particular instances and not others.) As I have discussed, exploitation and settler colonialism are interrelated but distinct historical formations, each with its own logics regarding Indigenous people; that is why postcolonial theory is often not a good fit in settler states like the United States (Byrd; Veracini, Settler Colonialism). These differences in colonial logics could have important implications for how anthropologists from different colonial powers represent Indigenous people in different parts of the world particularly during the historical period Applegarth examines. Thus, a productive direction for future research might be comparative study of emerging ethnographic genres across different European and US colonial formations.
In Plateau Indian Ways with Words: The Rhetorical Tradition of the Tribes of the Inland Pacific Northwest (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), Barbara Monroe investigates the persistence of distinctive cultural rhetorics among Plateau Indian peoples. Drawing on Scott Richard Lyons’s theorization of Indigenous social and cultural change as a process of “modernizing the ethnie,” Monroe traces “an unbroken line of descent in the Native domain of rhetoric” (xx) over the last century and a half. Using critical discourse analysis, she examines several archival caches: verbatim transcripts of translated speeches delivered at United States-Plateau Indian councils between 1855 and 1870, Plateau Indian writing in a variety of public and private genres produced between 1910 and 1921, and minutes from meetings of the Confederated Tribes of the Yakima Nation’s 1955–1956 General Council deliberations. Through this analysis, she identifies rhetorical patterns, purposes, and values that Plateau Indian communities sustained through the first century of US (settler) colonialism in the region.

Monroe then turns to a corpus of student essays collected from two reservation schools between 2000 and 2004. She discusses the persistence of distinctively Plateau Indian rhetorical patterns in students’ writing, as well as their creative adaptation of new discourses and genres, including the essayistic literacies of school. From speeches by tribal leaders in the 1850s to rap lyrics composed by twenty-first-century Plateau Indian youths—a period spanning the arrival of US settlers, the move to reservations, the adoption of English literacy, the influences of popular culture, and the emergence of digital writing technologies—Monroe finds that seven generations of Plateau Indians have continuously modernized traditional rhetorical resources to enact their cultural identities and reassert tribal sovereignty.

Monroe identifies four distinctive “strategies of personalization” (17) characteristic of Plateau Indian rhetorics across this timespan. The first is the use of experiential knowledge as supporting evidence, or what Monroe calls “arguing-with-story” (22), a form of self-location that simultaneously frames the limitations of the speaker’s subjective knowledge, establishes relationships with the audience, and respects listeners’ right to draw their own conclusions. The second strategy, which she labels “high affect,” is a means of communicating “sincerity, conviction, and lack of affectation” (27) while dramatizing a point. The third strategy is the “suspended thesis,” or “suspenseful arrangement” (28). In Plateau Indian arguing-as-story, arrangement is not necessarily chronological. The story may be recursive, and its argument may be nonlinear or indirect, with the larger point either explicitly stated at the end of the performance or left to the audience’s interpretation. The final strategy Monroe identifies is “situated elaboration/selective detail” (32). This strategy responds to culturally specific notions of appropriateness, i.e. the situated nature of who is authorized to speak and/or write about what topics, at what length,
and in what genres. All of these strategies, Monroe argues, serve a central value in Plateau Indian societies: respect for personal autonomy grounded in an understanding of “the independent self as an interdependent self” (38) in relationship with both family and land.

As Monroe asserts, her study of these rhetorical patterns is “not a formalist exercise” (21). Rather, it is “a project of recovery with an activist agenda. Before the rhetorical sovereignty of Plateau Indian students can be honored, their characteristic discursive practices must first be recognized as distinctive and historical” (21–22). Like the classic study by Shirley Brice Heath that the book’s title evokes, *Plateau Indian Ways with Words* is motivated by a deep concern with how culturally rooted discursive differences shape students’ educational experiences. Monroe says teachers often tell her that there is “something special about Indian student writing” (xvii), but they are hard-pressed to define what it is or determine how to respond. Standardized testing regimes that privilege white language practices produce the “achievement gap”—the latest iteration of “the Indian problem” (158)—and Monroe views the national standards movement launched by No Child Left Behind as a particular threat to rhetorical sovereignty. Based on her findings, Monroe offers concrete strategies for developing culturally relevant literacy pedagogy in four institutional settings: tribally controlled institutions, public schools on or near reservations, white-dominant public schools, and postsecondary institutions.

While Monroe argues for assignments and assessment practices that build on points of “cultural congruence” between Indigenous and school-based rhetorics (169), she also challenges essentialist discourses about Native American culture that fail to acknowledge the dynamism and diversity of Indigenous communities. She suggests that educators embrace a range of strategies for making literacy education relevant for Native students, including drawing on youth culture, fostering critical awareness of structures of oppression, diversifying curricular representations of Indigenous people and experiences, inviting hybridized discourses and genres, and providing opportunities to write using new media. Such strategies, she argues, will enable Plateau Indian students to carry on their ancestors’ tradition of modernizing the *ethnie* and asserting rhetorical sovereignty using all available means.

I wish *Plateau Indian Ways with Words* had been available when I first began researching tribal college writing instruction. Monroe insightfully charts many of the issues and theoretical concerns I have grappled with in my own work, and I very much admire the way she avoids common shortcomings in the literature on Native American learners. Even as she thoughtfully considers the cultural contexts from which Plateau Indian rhetorics emerge, she refuses to lapse into essentialism, repeatedly insisting that we recognize what Lyons calls “the irreducible modernity and diversity that inheres in every Native community and has for some time” (“Actually Existing” 297). She rightly observes that static notions of Native American identity...
and authenticity are, in fact, (settler) colonial constructs. Indeed, throughout the book, she is consistently attentive to how Plateau Indian peoples have responded to the machinations and structures of (settler) colonialism—not only to policies of cultural assimilation, but also to how the United States has infringed on Plateau Indian political sovereignty, dispossessed their communities of land and resources, and maintained racialized structures of social and economic oppression that perpetuate high rates of poverty in many reservation communities. I particularly value her emphasis on the agency that Plateau Indian communities have exercised in the pursuit of English literacy and how they have used that literacy to assert self-determination and sovereignty in a variety of domains.

My one quibble with Plateau Indian Ways with Words is that it might have been more specific about the particular type of colonialism that Plateau Indians have been resisting. I don’t think this lack of specificity impedes Monroe’s arguments. She carefully attends to many of the defining features of US settler colonialism: the overriding drive to acquire Native lands and resources, the construction of biological notions of race and blood quantum that attempt to control who counts as Indigenous, the function of static notions of culture that consign Native people to the past, the way discourses of Native tragedy deny the possibility of positive futures, and the fact that US (settler) colonialism is ongoing. What I think settler colonial theory might have offered Monroe is a more pointed explanation of how—and why—all of these features work together to tell Indigenous people “you, go away,” which in turn helps us understand some of the stakes of Native American rhetorics. In the context of ongoing settler colonialism, Indigenous survival is resistance (Veracini, “Introducing”), and continuing to assert Native presence and rhetorical sovereignty is thus crucial. Furthermore, clearly articulating the settler colonial situation in this US context might allow future researchers to more precisely account for how other communities modernize their rhetorical etnie within different colonial formations.

In his 2000 essay, “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?” Lyons called on the “C&R Ranch”—that is, the field of composition and rhetoric—to recognize its own “rhetorical imperialism” (458). Up to that point, the limited literature on Native American rhetorics had largely been perpetuating settler colonial “stereotypes, cultural appropriation, and a virtual absence of discourse on sovereignty and the status of Indian nations” (458). Lyons insisted that the field acknowledge the persistence of Native peoples and political claims in the twenty-first century as well as the colonized contexts in which Native rhetors often speak and write. The last two decades have seen a growing body of work on Indigenous rhetorics and mounting calls to decolonize our knowledge-making in our discipline (e.g., Villanueva; Baca and Villanueva; Driskill; Powell; Haas; Cushman; Riley-Mukavetz; Powell et al.). While multiple frameworks are useful for conceptualizing
colonialisms, and decolonization can and should take many forms, one promising option is what Veracini calls the “settler colonial turn” (Settler Colonial Present 1).

This theoretical movement has helped me recognize the spatialized structures of invasion that shape many of the exigencies to which Diné College students respond, the stakes of their rhetorical education, and the complexities of my presence in Crownpoint. Furthermore, it is enabling me to see how those spaces and experiences connect to my classrooms in Salt Lake City, a place with its own culturally specific settler colonial rhetorics that I am just beginning to understand. Other scholars in our field are also beginning to take up settler colonial frameworks in exciting ways (e.g., Nichols; King). As I hope this essay suggests, settler colonial theory can offer a productive lens for examining an array of interrelated structural oppressions in the United States: it is not just a niche concern for those of us focusing specifically on Indigenous issues. Indeed, confining such discussions to the subfield of Indigenous rhetorics perpetuates the very ignorance and erasures on which settler colonialism depends.

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Works Cited


