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Migrations/Removals

An x-mark is a treaty signature. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was a common practice for treaty commissioners to have their Indian interlocutors make x-marks as signifiers of presence and agreement. Many an Indian's signature was recorded by the phrase "his x-mark," and what the x-mark meant was consent.

An x-mark also signified coercion. As everyone knows, treaties were made under conditions that were generally unfavorable to Indians, and as a result they were often accompanied by protest. Treaties led to dramatic changes in the Indian world: loss of land and political autonomy, assent to assimilation policies, the creation of quasi-private property on communal lands, and much else. Natives knew it and sometimes resisted it. At treaty councils individuals retained a right to withhold their x-marks, and many did. But most did not. Most made their x-marks.

An x-mark is a sign of consent in a context of coercion; it is the agreement one makes when there seems to be little choice in the matter. To the extent that little choice isn't the quite same thing as no choice, it signifies Indian agency. To the extent that little choice isn't exactly what is meant by the word *liberty*, it signifies the political realities of the treaty era (and perhaps the realities of our own complicated age as well).

An x-mark is a sign of contamination. There were no "treaties" before the arrival of the whites, no alphabetic writing or "signatures" at all, although there were practices of making formal agreements between different communities (wampum belts would be one example). Before the arrival of the whites, communities dealt respectfully with each other in a way that encouraged different peoples to retain their ways of life, while at the same time establishing territorial boundaries, conditions of trade, and what

would now be called “diplomatic relations.” Treaties were different. When made with Europeans—and especially later when made with Americans—treaties increasingly introduced new and unfamiliar concepts that situated peoples, parties, lands, and relationships between them differently. Treaties compelled Indians to change how they lived. They addressed the parties who signed treaties in a new way, too—as “nations”—thus bringing to bear a platonic character that wasn’t necessarily there before.¹ Smaller groups became larger, more nominative, and more abstractly defined as political entities, assuming a “soul” or “spiritual principle” that in all likelihood did not exist—at least not in the way we think of such things now—prior to the arrival of the whites and their strange ways of doing things.²

Edmund Danziger writes of the first treaty council between the Ojibwe and the Americans at La Pointe on Madeline Island (offshore present-day Bayfield, Wisconsin, on Lake Superior): “Jealousy and ill will between the lake and Mississippi River bands threatened to break up the council at La Pointe. The Mississippi bands would not even talk to their cousins from the east, much less agree to sell any mutually held lands.”³ This was 1854, a period when the Ojibwe had “ripened into independent communities whose only sense of tribal unity came from language, kinship, and clan membership.”⁴ Up until the eighteenth century the Apostle Islands and Chequamegon Bay region had been the center of Ojibwe power, and Madeline Island was the penultimate stopping point of the Great Migration; but the fur trade compelled Ojibwe people to continue migrating to places as far-flung as southern Michigan and western Minnesota, and any political ties that may have once existed had long since atrophied. Still, the La Pointe treaty characterized these groups as a single political entity, and since treaties are by definition contracts between nations, it turned them into a “nation.” Article II established “territory,” Article III created “allotments,” Articles IV, V, and VI promised “annuities” (including monies, agricultural implements, education, blacksmiths, and assistance with paying off debts owed to traders), and these promises resulted in the arrival of new technologies, cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of living. These things are sometimes characterized as signs of “colonization” and “assimilation”—as well as “Civilization” in the parlance of the mid-nineteenth century—but they can just as well be described as characteristics of modernity. They contaminated the life-world of Ojibwe who made their x-marks, so Ojibwe cultural purity (if such a thing had ever actually existed) would exist no more.

The x-mark is a contaminated and coerced sign of consent made under conditions that are not of one’s making. It signifies power and a lack of

power, agency and a lack of agency. It is a decision one makes when something has already been decided for you, but it is still a decision. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. And yet there is always the prospect of slippage, indeterminacy, unforeseen consequences, or unintended results; it is always possible, that is, that an x-mark could result in something good. Why else, we must ask, would someone bother to make it? I use the x-mark to symbolize Native assent to things (concepts, policies, technologies, ideas) that, while not necessarily traditional in origin, can sometimes turn out all right and occasionally even good.

The First Remove

If anything can be considered an enduring value for Ojibwe people, it has got to be migration. The legend of the Great Migration passed down through the oral tradition begins in a time when *anishinaabeg* were living as one large, undifferentiated group (we would probably call them Algonquins today) along the eastern seaboard of the United States and Canada. Seven prophets emerged to tell the people to move westward or risk their lives. A woman dreamed about standing on the back of a turtle, and it was decided that a turtle-shaped island would be the place where the people would go. The first stopping point of the Great Migration was likely an island near Montreal in the Saint Lawrence River, but that was only the beginning of their journey. The people followed a vision of a Sacred Shell, the *miigis* shell, which compelled them to keep moving. The second stopping point was Niagara Falls, but the Haudenosaunee objected and fought with the people. Eventually, a pipe was shared and peace was made, and the people moved farther westward to the third stopping point: a place described as “a river that slices like a knife,” in all likelihood near the Detroit River where Lake Erie and Lake Huron connect. We are told that it was there that the Three Fires—Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe—emerged and took their leave of one another. The Great Migration continued, always leaving in its wake new peoples and new communities scattered along the Saint Lawrence and the Great Lakes. The fourth place was found after a boy had a dream revealing stepping stones in a river; these led to islands along the north shore of Lake Huron, of which Manitoulin Island was the largest, and for a time it became a great Ojibwe seat of power in the region. The fifth stopping point was Sault Sainte Marie, which would eventually become a fur-trading center. From the Sault the Ojibwe divided into two parties taking different paths around Lake Superior—one to the north, the other traveling

south, both groups leaving a record of impressive rock paintings that survive yet today—eventually meeting at Spirit Island, a sixth stopping point where a *miigis* emerged, near Duluth, Minnesota. It was there that another prophecy was fulfilled, as this was a place “where the food grows on water,” referring to *manoomin* or wild rice. *Manoomin* is now both a nutritional staple and a sacred food for the Ojibwe. The Sacred Shell rose on one last occasion, leading the people to the seventh and final stopping point: Madeline Island, a turtle-shaped island, and the same place where the Ojibwe eventually made that fateful treaty at La Pointe. The people had arrived at last, the ancient prophecies were fulfilled, and the Great Migration seemed complete. Well, at least for a moment.

The Great Migration probably started around 900 CE and took some five hundred years to finish—if it really can be said to have “finished” at all, for in fact the Ojibwe kept moving, sometimes by choice, sometimes by following the seasons, and sometimes because other people said it was time to move. But even before the era of colonization, migrating had become a primary cultural value. The Ojibwe were a people on the move. The Ojibwe envisioned life as a path and death as a journey; even *Ojibwemowin*, the Ojibwe language, is constituted by verbs on the move. What does migration produce? As we can see in the story of the Great Migration, it produces *difference*: new communities, new peoples, new ways of living, new sacred foods, new stories, and new ceremonies. The old never dies; it just gets supplemented by the new, and one result is diversity. What was once undifferentiated is now represented by many different fires, not only the new peoples who emerged from the Great Migration—the Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe—but those who stayed behind as well. The Abanaki, for example, get their name from a word that refers to both “east” and “morning”—*waaban*—while *aki* signifies their homeland. *Waabanaki*, as the story goes, are the daybreak people of the east who decided to remain and as a result differentiated into a people distinct from Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe. Migration produced a sense of movement and diversity as worthy values unto themselves; stagnation was always impossible in a people on the move. Yet the Great Migration also speaks of *home*. There was always a destination in view, oh yes, but the wondrous thing is, it kept changing! One moment the Great Migration had come to an end; the next moment people were telling stories about the last two, three, four stopping points they encountered. Home is a stopping point, for there is no sense in the migration story that there will be only one home for only one people forever. That was what the Great Migration was all about: a moving away from an

undifferentiated singularity that had existed in the time long ago toward a more localized differentiation of the new. Finally, migration tends to privilege *the small*: not great warriors whose names are long remembered in tribal epideictic, not glorious monuments to conquest and victory, but the power of little things—a shell, a food that grows on water, the dreams of a woman or a little boy. The Great Migration not only included these humble things but followed them as guiding visions. Diversity, home, stopping points, and the power of the small: these are the lessons of the Great Migration insofar as it reveals something we might call the “spirit of a people.”

This faith in migration as a value is what Gerald Vizenor has called transmotion: a “sense of native motion and an active presence” that is recognized by “survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty.” It’s a “*sui generis* sovereignty” that is reproduced in “creation stories, totemic visions, reincarnation, and sovenance,” and honored in stories. “Native stories of survivance are the creases of transmotion,” writes Vizenor.⁵ “Stories keep us migrating home,” writes Kimberly Blaeser.⁶

The Second Remove

In the late summer of 1889, three federal commissioners traveled to the woods of Minnesota to negotiate an allotment and removal treaty with Ojibwe. The Nelson Act is Minnesota’s variant of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, which required Indian people to abandon communal lands for the adoption of new individual allotments: “private property.” The stated goal was the transformation of Indians into agrarian capitalists. Based on a somewhat superstitious belief in the magical civilizing powers of private property, the Nelson Act was designed to assimilate Indians while opening up “surplus land” for settlers, lumber companies, and the U.S. government. (It had also been planned to remove all Ojibwe to a single reservation, White Earth, but that goal was never realized.) Henry Rice, Martin Marty, and Joseph B. Whiting were the commissioners entrusted with the negotiations to be held at Red Lake, White Earth, Gull Lake, Leech Lake, Cass Lake, Lake Winnibigoshish, White Oak Point, Mille Lacs, Grand Portage, Bois Forte, Vermillion Lake, and Fond du Lac, and they reported the results of their work to President Benjamin Harrison.

Rice, Marty, and Whiting met with the White Oak Point band that lived along the Mississippi River near present-day Federal Dam, Boy River, and Bena on four occasions during September 1889. It was the rice-making time, when the food that grows on water is harvested and processed for

consumption over the following year. Deliberations were recorded, translated, and published in Rice's report, which opens with a note of concern regarding the poor state of the people as he found them: "The condition of the Indians at White Oak Point is described as beyond hope of improvement, they being dissipated and dissolute, but they still have intelligence enough to ask that whiskey may be kept from the country and that missionaries and schoolteachers be sent them."⁷ Their troubled state was the result of the Americans dishonoring treaties they had previously made and the confinement of Ojibwe to a tiny parcel of land that prohibited effective hunting and gathering. The United States had failed to pay them the annuities and goods they had been promised in exchange for earlier land cessions, and reservoir dam projects had flooded huge sections of hunting and gathering territory. In a startlingly short period of time, quality of life at White Oak Point had plummeted from prosperity to impoverishment; their sad condition reflected it, and Rice acknowledged that it was the Americans' fault.

The first council was held on September 4 at Payment Point on the Mississippi River. Rice complained in his report, and apparently at the meeting as well, that the council had to be conducted "in the open air, there being no settlement of any kind at this place," to which Kah-Way-Din, an elder and leader in attendance, responded with a history lesson: "There was a promise made to the Indians here at White Oak Point that there should be a schoolhouse, and if it had been here, you could have talked in that schoolhouse."⁸ Kah-Way-Din was referring to an earlier treaty made in 1867 that had gone unfulfilled by the Americans, the disappointment and bitter frustration of which was leading Kah-Way-Din to consider withholding his x-mark this time around:

There was a mill promised for this place too, but we never saw it. They told us that whenever the whites wanted to saw anything, we could allow them to saw their lumber in the mill, and that the whites would pay us. And there was cattle promised to us then, and now this same promise is repeated. You say the truth when you say these Indians are poor. You see the rents in my nails; if I wanted to hold something, I could not do it because my fingernails are torn. If the cattle had not died on the road that had been promised us in the name of the Great Father, maybe our young men would be able to use those cattle in their work. That is the reason I speak to you on behalf of my friends here, not to sign until we have made up our minds to sign.⁹

Torn fingernails are a sign of malnutrition and possibly starvation; the White Oak Point Ojibwe were suffering badly and it was the Americans' fault. The council continued on with Rice presenting an "extended explanation" of allotment, Whiting following with a speech on the value of industriousness, and Marty concluding with the promise of a church. The Nelson Act was signed by most people at White Oak Point, including Kah-Way-Din, and the Ojibwe got on with the task of making rice. As a result of the Nelson Act, the White Oak Point band was consolidated with several other bands into what is now called the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; and as another result, Leech Lake controls only 5 percent of its original treaty-established land base today.

Such grim results are often blamed on an impoverishment of Indian life caused by the treaties and assimilation policies, but perhaps the more urgent lesson is simply a cautionary tale about the risks of dealing with people who don't keep their word. Kah-Way-Din threatened to withhold his x-mark not because he thought it would initiate the arrival of the new, but because his previous experiences had taught him to distrust the Americans. Once bitten, twice shy. He signed anyway, but only after making the federal commissioners squirm.

Another White Oak Point Ojibwe who signed the Nelson Act agreement (signature 68) was a young man named Nay-Tah-Wish-Kung, soon to be renamed John Lyons. He was my great-great-grandfather, the first Lyons, and the first in my lineage to write in the English language. What he wrote was the letter X.

Indian Time

Native people have a lot to forgive. When Columbus came there were around ten million people living north of the Rio Grande; by 1900, only 250,000 Natives survived in the United States. They died from disease, yes, and also from war, but by the turn of the twentieth century Indians were mostly dying from utter poverty. The assimilation period was especially bad, as Natives lived on reservations run like refugee camps and children were no longer being raised in their communities but in boarding schools. (Truly, a community without any children can be a dangerous and volatile place.) Treaty-established reservations were whittled away by allotment policy; between 1887 and 1934, Indian landholdings shrank from 138 million acres to 48 million.¹⁰ Indian languages were attacked by teachers, and religions were attacked by missionaries and policy makers.

We are still living the legacies of this history. American Indians live below the poverty line at twice the rate of the general American population—more than 25 percent.¹¹ Natives are twice as likely to die young as the general population, with a 638 percent greater chance of dying from an alcohol-related disease, an 81 percent greater chance of being murdered, and a 91 percent greater chance of committing suicide.¹² Native teens are fully three times as likely to kill themselves as are other teenagers.¹³ Our heritage languages are in decline. No fewer than 45 out of a presently spoken 154 languages in the United States face an imminent extinction, with another 90 predicted to go silent by 2050.¹⁴ To get a sense of how immediate this language decline is, consider that in 1950 the U.S. Census Bureau recorded no fewer than 87.4 percent of American Indians speaking heritage languages as first languages; by 1980 that had plummeted to 29.3 percent; and by 2000, only 18 percent spoke languages other than English at home.¹⁵

These grim statistics are not the result of Native migrations but more the consequence of “removalism.” Removal was a federal policy established in 1830 by President Andrew Jackson, and it would now go by the name of ethnic cleansing. Removal is to migration what rape is to sex, and while the original political policy was concerned with actual physical removals like the Trail of Tears, the underlying ideology of removal in its own way justified and encouraged the systematic losses of Indian life: the removal of livelihood and language, the removal of security and self-esteem, the removal of religion and respect. Bit by bit, change by change, loss by ever-exacting loss, removalism has been as much a legacy of our history as migration, and colonialism was its cause.

Americans are no longer pursuing removalism, and reversing our losses is now up to us; nonetheless the gaping wounds of history are still visible and will remain so as long as the relationship between Native and newcomer is defined by past betrayals and present inequalities. But what of those promises made? I refer not only to the commitments made by whites to Natives but also to the promises made by Natives to themselves and their future heirs. X-marks were commitments to living a new way of life, not only in the immediate present but “for as long as the grass grows and the rivers flow.” How do they appear to us now? *They only signed treaties because they were forced to sign.* No one was forced to sign a treaty. *They did not understand what the treaties meant.* Were the Natives not intelligent? Does the historical record not show that they understood rather clearly what was at stake? *It’s ancient history.* Is that not what antisovereignty groups say when arguing that treaty rights are

of little consequence because Natives no longer live in wigwams or hunt the buffalo? I am interested in the promise of the x-mark insofar as it still stands, or more precisely as the promise moves through *time*, *space*, and *discourse*. Let's consider these three contexts more closely.

The time of the x-mark might as well be called "Indian time." This multi-layered expression has several different meanings, the most prominent being a Native version of the ubiquitous "c.p. time" ("colored people's time"), a racist stereotype that emerged in the colonies to characterize the colonized's ostensible lack of punctuality. This sense of Indian time is only slightly altered when appropriated by Native people as an excuse for our own lateness (e.g., "Sorry I'm so late. I'm running on Indian time"). As with all appropriations of racial slurs (the n-word is another example), it both defangs the slur and creates new problems. An older meaning of Indian time seems to capture a sense of doing things when the moment is right. Ceremonialists use the expression in this way to describe a certain spiritual rightness, but it could also describe a natural or seasonal temporality. From this sense, running on Indian time means knowing precisely when to start harvesting wild rice: not too early (it must be ripe) and not too late (it must still be on the stalks and not at the bottom of the lake). Finally, we've all heard the stereotypical line that Indian time is "circular" rather than "linear," a characteristic we apparently share with Disney's *The Lion King*. I object to that particular variant on the grounds that Indian time isn't any more circular or less linear than anyone else's sense of time, and why would we expect it to be? Shape is a characteristic of space, not time.

X-marks are made in a different kind of Indian time that must be characterized in some potentially problematic ways. First, I distinguish between traditional and modern time, clocking the supplanting of the former by the latter at around 1492, or really when the treaties were made. This should be understood as a revision of the older imperialist measurements of time according to misguided teleologies of Progress, particularly the ethnocentric chronology of Savagism to Barbarism to Civilization.¹⁶ Where treaties say "Civilization" we can substitute "modernity" without losing the basic spirit of what is usually described—schools, science, churches—yet shedding the unkind connotations of ethnocentrism, superiority, and progress that no one would defend now. This is likely how the treaties appeared to the Natives who gave them their x-marks: as promises of a new way of life, not the removal of "savage" or "barbaric" qualities (the latter always being imperialistic obsessions and not Native concerns). My distinction between the traditional and the modern must

also be understood as a challenge to the stereotype of Indian time as simplistically circular and cyclical and “natural.”

The most problematic aspect of a modern/traditional distinction is, of course, its binary-oppositional character: that is, those things we identify as modern can often be discovered in what we call the traditional, and vice versa. Everything is relative and exists on a continuum that does not carve neatly into two separate and oppositional wholes. There are no great leaps in the story of human history, only differences and definitions made in contexts of power that have often proven to be ethnocentric at best and genocidal at worst. I would be the last to disagree with that general objection. At the same time, I think the distinction is often useful as a way to understand the various discourses regarding time and change that Indian people advanced. We need a way to characterize the dramatic changes of life that treaties authorized and initiated. That language used to be *savage/civilized*, but it never served us well and won't be revisited anytime soon. Nativists tend to prefer *native/white*, but the obvious objection there is that time does not recognize racial binaries. My preference for *traditional/modern* comes not from a deep-rooted admiration on my part for the Enlightenment but rather from my conviction that the original x-marks were pledges to adopt new ways of living that, looking backwards, seem most accurately described as modern.

Nativists, or what we will call traditionalists, seek to undo the grim legacies of history by proclaiming the primacy of traditionalism; in so doing, they sometimes engage in battle with a removalism that no longer exists, or, worse, a removalism “internalized” by a self-defeated population. Traditionalists do not deconstruct binaries so much as flip the script: now “white” or “Western” time is corrupt and only pure traditionalism can save us from further losses. It is in opposition to this way of thinking that my x-mark is made; for while I clearly have no truck with the traditional, the x-mark is never made out of fear of corruption. It simply works with what we have in order to produce something good. X-marks are made with a view of the new as merely another stopping point in a migration that is always heading for home, always keeping time on the move.

But what exactly do we mean by the terms “modern” and “traditional”? Let us begin with tradition, which is not a traditional Native notion but an inheritance from Europe and the English language. Raymond Williams considered “tradition” a “particularly difficult word” to understand for its inconsistent and selective meaning; that is, not every old thing gets called traditional (much less exalted as such), but when it does, it tends

to demand “our respect and duty” in keeping with the original meaning of its Latin root word (*tradere*) signifying “surrender or betrayal.”¹⁷ The original word also implied a sense of “handing down” or “delivering,” which is how traditionalists always deploy the concept. But sometimes one’s surrender to tradition entails a betrayal of something else that is good, and that’s where problems can emerge in traditionalist discourse. Surrendering a good in the name of tradition would have made little sense to migrating peoples and prophets.

There is also the problem of how the modern world generally views “traditional societies.” As the African philosopher Achille Mbembe has argued, three features tend to characterize the idea of traditional societies in discourses that emanate not only from “the West” but to a startling degree from traditionalists. First, *facticity and arbitrariness*, the idea that traditional people do not “examine” something from their world; rather, “the thing is . . . there is nothing to justify.”¹⁸ *It came to meet us. It was always there.* This idea attributes to traditional societies the ostensible habit of always using myth and fable “in contrast to reason in the West” to denote order and the passage of time: “there is little place for open argument; it is enough to invoke the time of origins,” hence “such societies are incapable of uttering the universal.”¹⁹ The second feature is even worse: “these societies are seen as living under the burden of charms, spells, and prodigies” and are thereby perceived as “resistant to change.”²⁰ Time “is supposedly stationary: thus the importance of repetition and cycles.”²¹ Third, “the ‘person’ is seen as predominant over the ‘individual,’ considered (it is added) ‘a strictly Western creation.’ Instead of the individual, there are entities, captives of magical signs, amid an enchanted and mysterious universe.”²² Mbembe attacks the myth of the traditional society as little more than a racist stereotype that functions to keep Africans in the realm of what he calls “nothingness,” but in fact these tendencies are not only the habits of racists or anthropologists; they also appear in the discourse of traditionalists (albeit with the script flipped). The Indian time initiated by an x-mark, by contrast, does not deny or discount traditional time. Rather, it moves beyond it.

As for modernity, I have in mind a general sense of the new, a feeling regarding one’s life in “modern times” that can be distinguished from “the way we used to live.” In fact, this was the original meaning of the word. Hans Robert Jauss locates the first use of the Latin *modernus* in the fifth century to distinguish the Christian present from the Roman, pagan past, and ever since the word has been used to characterize a sense of some great epochal change underfoot.²³ Today’s understanding of the

modern has an additional twist to it, one that is more, well, modern, as Anthony Giddens explains:

At its simplest, modernity is a shorthand term for modern society or industrial civilization. Portrayed in more detail, it is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions—which unlike any preceding culture lives in the future rather than the past.²⁴

This understanding of modernity has been attacked by traditionalists, postmodernists, and fundamentalists of all stripes, but I follow Jürgen Habermas in seeing modernity as neither inherently negative nor positive; it is, rather, “an incomplete project” that “still depends on vital heritages, but would be impoverished through mere traditionalism.”²⁵ The particular x-marks I am interested in—identity, culture, and the idea of the Indian nation—are historically contingent concepts, and my analyses of them should be understood as serving the larger project of developing functional modern institutions in Native America; that is, I see the modernization that was initiated by treaty signers as an unfinished project that can and should be pursued further. I want more of it, not less. The idea of the Indian nation, as only one example, is a modern idea that I believe was invented precisely at the moment of treaty, hence my call for more modernization is simultaneously a demand for greater nationalization. Now, many thinkers today are deeply invested in traditionalism and this is not necessarily a problem. It can become a problem, however, when the traditional is transformed into a fetish, loses its realism, denies the actually existing diversity of Indian life, and/or confuses modern practices and institutions with the assimilation of a “white” or “Western” identity. There’s a baby here and some bathwater too, and we must be careful about throwing things out.

The idea of an x-mark assumes that indigenous communities are and have always been composed of human beings who possess reason, rationality, individuality, an ability to think and to question, a suspicion toward religious dogma or political authoritarianism, a desire to improve their lot and the futures of their progeny, and a wish to play some part in

the larger world. Surely, these characteristics are not the exclusive property of “white” people or the “West,” and to the extent that any of them can be characterized as “modern” (not all of them can, to be sure), they seem associated with the passage of time, not identity. Yet it is also the case that since modernity’s onset in Native America—a process that happened by way of conquest and colonization—there has always been a great number of different, interlocking “epochs” or *durées* at any given moment: multiple modes of production, diversities of belief, contending memories, and competing future visions—in other words, different times unfolding in common space. This has given us the businessman living next door to the medicine man, both trapline and assembly line, and the power of a Great Spirit competing with “ardent spirits.” It is nearly impossible to speak with much accuracy of the times before or after colonization (although we must try to do so anyway in order to analyze history); nor can we imagine migratory times unfolding in a linear progression with everyone marching in lockstep toward a new order (although dominant orders do come and go). Indian time tends to move like a people migrating home: in fits and starts, with false beginnings and many fulfilled endings, always looking to both past and future, always producing diversity. If the expression “Indian time” means anything, it should signify this history of temporal multiplicity. For far too long Natives have been discussed exclusively in the past tense, and for far too long modernity has been discussed as if it were strictly a Western imposition. It is time to acknowledge not only our continued presence in history, but also the reality of Indian time on the move.

The Third Remove

My grandfather always enjoyed telling exciting stories to his grandchildren about his grandfather—“a real old-time Indian”—whom he characterized as living in a traditional manner, sometimes wearing buckskin clothes, always speaking Ojibwe, and typically using his old birch-bark canoe to hunt and fish. I have a photograph of John Lyons taken several years after the Nelson Act’s passage that depicts him sitting with a dignified group of Ojibwe leaders in Bemidji, Minnesota. In the photo, he appears to be a large man with dark skin and a serious expression, yet also with laugh lines at the corners of his eyes and mouth. He wears a nice suit for those days (dark wool, not buckskin) and what appears to be a bowler hat. The photograph was given to me by my great-uncle Ernest Lyons, who was ninety-three at the time. We were sitting at his kitchen

table. When I asked him who was John, Uncle Ernest said, “the man with the X over his head.” There it was: a shaky little X in black ink scrawled long ago, presumably so that we might not forget.

John married Josephine, formerly Pah-Gwah-Bin-Dig-O-Quay, and today they are buried in the Lyons plot of the old Bena cemetery overlooking Lake Winnibigoshish. In the late 1990s I was told by an elder that Josephine Lyons was the last to see the spirit from which Leech Lake derives its name (*Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag*), literally, “the place where there are a lot of leeches.” “She was just a girl and she saw large ripples and a wake in the water,” explained this elder, “and then she saw its large, black back.” Josephine Lyons had children before marrying John and is remembered by many Leech Lakers who claim her as an ancestor. Being a woman, she was never asked for her x-mark by American treaty commissioners, but she is still honored today in a tribal and familial consciousness.

John and Josephine gave birth to Bill Lyons, my great-grandfather, and he became mayor of Bena, an old logging town of some two hundred residents located near railroad tracks, tall trees, dams, and Highway 2. In April 1899 the *Cass Lake Independent* wrote, “The land near Bena is mostly covered by allotments. The town is quite centrally located on the reservation and is the proper point at which to locate the Agency buildings. Bena is also the shipping point to the Winnibigoshish Dam.”²⁶ Incorporated as a formal town in October 1906, Bena’s population swelled from two hundred residents to near eighteen hundred during the timber boom initiated by the Nelson Act. (Bena has since resumed its former population.) A Civilian Conservation Corps camp was built in Bena in May 1933 and operated until 1942, after which it housed German prisoners of war until 1945. In its economic heyday, Bena reportedly had five saloons, five hotels, a “sporting house,” and other sundry businesses that one would expect to find in any boomtown. In 1922 a Native American Church (NAC) was established at Ryan’s Village just outside of Bena, bringing the syncretic peyote religion from the plains to the north woods. Different times were on the move in Bena during the first half of the twentieth century and Indians both benefited from and were dispossessed by the economic order initiated by the Nelson Act. (It depends on which Indians we’re talking about.) As for religious expression, Bena had all kinds: NAC peyotists, Catholics, Episcopalians, sinners of various stripes, and participants in Mike Rabbit’s Midewiwin lodge, which eventually went dormant during the 1940s.

The second half of the century was unkind to Bena. Gerald Vizenor, whose relative Clem Beaulieu lived across the street from my grandparents

and father, wrote in *Interior Landscapes* (1990) that Bena had developed “the reputation of being the ‘Little Chicago’ of the north woods,” having the worst crime rate in the state of Minnesota and no fewer than 10 percent of its population serving hard time for felonies. Clem “said it was true what they said about his town. Bena was wicked, and the town was like no place in the world, but . . . it made it a great place for stories.” As for Vizenor himself, “I wrote about that wicked town but the town was never wicked to me.”²⁷ Bena provided source material for the village called Poverty in David Treuer’s novel *Little* (1996). I have relatives living in Bena who are unequivocal that the town is going to hell in a handbasket, but who say nonetheless they wouldn’t dream of living anywhere else.

Bill Lyons was mayor during the boom years, and he and his brother established a fishing-guide service called Lyons Landing that operated from 1932 to 1950, the first of its kind on the east end of Lake Winnibigoshish. It was wildly successful, and people still remember the long trains of parked cars along Highway 2 signaling that the Lyonses were out fishing with their customers. Most were out-of-state tourists; in 1936, more non-resident fishing licenses were sold at Bena than at any other agency in the state, more than eleven hundred in all.²⁸ Bill and Charles Lyons hired their children and other relatives to help the business grow, including Art Lyons, who, on August 28, 1957, set the Minnesota state record for the largest muskie; it weighed in at fifty-four pounds and was nearly as tall as he was. Mafia men were among their early clientele as they allegedly operated stills in the woods during Prohibition. One family story tells of a supposed run-in between Bill and Al Capone, but it has a suspiciously mythological quality that has always made me wonder. Lyons Landing closed in 1950 when Bill’s youngest son, my great-uncle William “Billy Boy” Lyons, became a bank robber in the Twin Cities and rang up so many legal bills that it broke the family business. Things fall apart. Yet to this day topographical maps of Lake Winnibigoshish still identify reefs and bays that were named (in English) by my (bilingual) great-grandfather Bill and his brother Charles. They made a lot of x-marks in those days—mayor, businessman, fishing guide, bank robber—in the ever-shifting spaces of Bena.

Indian Space

Everyone knows what Indian space is like. It is circular, communal, and never near a cosmopolitan center. (Even when it is, it’s not.) It is always pungent: smoky and sagey in a manner that evokes the past. Things are organized in fours. It is spiritual and stoic, quiet like a Quaker service,

yet always with dogs around (and they always stay in the background). Indian space is dark and warm, not at all unpleasant, but then again it is not very exciting either. Women work quietly with children at their sides while the men are always just returning. A pot of food is simmering and people's tones of voice seem to be hushed. This space is poor, economically speaking, and therefore to be pitied; at the same time it is an honor to inhabit this space, if only for a moment. Friends of the Indian will note a pristine natural beauty. Indian haters will note the litter strewn in the ditches, the diapers and bottles and Styrofoam cups: tragic contradictions. Stuff hangs in Indian space; it may be drying, it may signify some religious meaning, or maybe it is just hanging. Indian space is not well maintained in the sense of interior decoration (Indians are unconcerned about such trivial bourgeois matters); rather, these spaces are "organic," "practical," and above all "communal." They are also secretive: hidden away, hard to find, closed to outsiders. When an outsider manages to enter Indian space, the emotion experienced is exhilaration: *I cannot believe I am here*. Indian space feels eternal and deep. Yet because of its communal quality and proliferation of good-natured humor it can also feel like the most casual space in the world. Above all, it is slow. Time creeps like the turtle in Indian space.

This is a stereotype, but persistent to say the least. Thinking historically means seeing different Indian spaces invented in different times and social contexts, and in fact our spaces have been imagined in many different ways since the first x-marks were made. At first, Indian space was isolated and always on the move; its image was the *camp*. On occasions when Native and newcomer had to meet, the space for doing so was a *frontier*. The frontier was traditionally conceived as the line where Civilization meets Wilderness, the latter as yet untamed by the former, so the concept is inseparable from imperialism. In 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau famously declared the frontier closed, leading Frederick Jackson Turner to advance his "frontier thesis" at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Jackson thought the significance of the frontier was its transformation of old Europeans into new Americans, a process that must have happened at the frontier line, as it produced characteristics that seemed specific to American identity: individualism, self-sufficiency, distrust of authority figures, lack of culture and arts, and a propensity for violence. As for the Indians imagined on the wild side of the line, they would either stay in their camps and vanish or evolve into someone who might yet live on the civilized side of time and space. Such was the logic of a world cut in two by imperialism.

At precisely the same time the frontier was declared closed, federal policy gurus were changing the logic of Indian space by delineating and distributing allotments. These divisions of communal land into individual parcels of private property not only created an abundance of “surplus land” offered to speculators and settlers, but also forged a new category for describing overlapping legal jurisdictions in Indian country: the *checkerboard*. Space imagined as a checkerboard means different people are ruled by different sovereigns at different times. Today at Leech Lake, for example, you can be issued a speeding ticket by tribal police, but only if you are a Leech Laker. If you are a non-Native, or an Indian hailing from elsewhere, you fall under the jurisdiction of the state of Minnesota, in keeping with Public Law 280. Should you commit a major crime at Leech Lake, you will fall under a third jurisdiction, that of the federal government, in keeping with the 1885 Major Crimes Act. Checkerboarded space can feel schizophrenic (as one imagines tribal police know all too well, given their task of having to visibly ascertain not only who is Indian, but if that Indian is from Leech Lake or someplace else, before putting on the siren). The world was still cut in two during the allotment era, but space was imagined in such a way that it put those two worlds into extremely close proximity. Practicality was never a goal of the spatial invention of the checkerboard.

In fact, the checkerboard has always been bogus anyway. From the perspective of the federal government, Indian space has been, simply, *Indian country* since 1790 when the phrase was invented.²⁹ A federal statute imagines this space as follows:

“Indian country” . . . means (a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and including rights-of-way running through the reservation, (b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state, and (c) all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same.³⁰

A clearer description of a colonized territory could scarcely be found anywhere. To live in Indian country is to live under the jurisdiction of the United States as a “dependent.” Indeed, if Indian space is a checkerboard, the idea of Indian country reveals who is actually playing the checkers. It’s worth mentioning that this same expression is used by the American

military—yes, even today—to describe enemy territory.³¹ Taken together, the two meanings of Indian country suggest an enemy territory under control, making that “dependent” an effective prisoner of war.

Sometimes old Indian space is reimagined in a new way. Roughly a century after its announced closing, the frontier made a comeback. In *Being and Becoming Indian* (1989), James Clifton defined frontier as “a culturally defined place where peoples with different culturally expressed identities meet and deal with each other.”³² In his book *Ethnocriticism* (1992), Arnold Krupat likewise reclaimed frontier as a metaphor for discursive space but sagely observed that “the two cultures which met and dealt with each other at the various frontiers . . . were almost never two cultures of equivalent material power.”³³ In *Mixedblood Messages* (1998), Louis Owens advanced the idea of “‘frontier space,’ wherein discourse is multidirectional and hybridized.” This would be “the zone of trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated” using “appropriation, inversion, and abrogation of authority.” Owens’s frontier space would stand “in neat opposition to the concept of ‘territory’ as territory is imagined and given form by the colonial enterprise in America”:

Whereas frontier is always unstable, multidirectional, hybridized, characterized by heteroglossia, and indeterminate, territory is clearly mapped, fully imagined as a place of containment, invented to control and subdue the dangerous potentialities of imagined Indians. Territory is conceived and designed to exclude the dangerous presence of that trickster at the heart of the Native American imagination, for the ultimate logic of territory is appropriation and occupation, and trickster defies appropriation and resists colonization.³⁴

Behind these reinventions of frontier space—as culturally different, politically unequal, and discursively slippery—there was an assumption that Indian space was inherently resistant, “mixed,” guided by tricksters, and generally in dialogue with whites.

Naturally, there was a reaction to this line of thought as the notion of a territory defined nationally reasserted itself after a long slumber. Postmodernists like Owens fell into the disfavor of scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and others waving the flag of nationalism who immediately called foul on any reinvention of Indian space as essentially “unstable, multidirectional, hybridized” or in some other way less than politically coherent. The space of any nation must be by definition stable, unidirectional, and whole (or at least that’s

the basic idea), so it's not much of a surprise that related figures—mixed-bloods, tricksters, cosmopolitans—were likewise condemned by the nationalists. There was a bit too much mixing going on during those days, and not only in Native discourse, as *mestizas*, nomads, border-crossers, and just about everything falling into the general category of the transnational became positively ubiquitous by turn of the millennium. It all appeared to conspire against the idea of the Indian nation as a viable political category in the twenty-first century, one with its own securely bounded and bordered senses of sovereignty.

It wasn't only Indians who reacted against porous postmodern metaphors and arguments for a politically unbounded and transnational sense of space. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) took global indigenous movements seriously and characterized them as a form of "subaltern nationalism" defined by two ambiguous functions. First, the subaltern nation "serves as a line of defense against the domination of more powerful nations and external economic, political, and ideological forces. The right to self-determination of subaltern nations is really a right to secession from the control of dominant powers."³⁵ In their analysis, subaltern nationalisms tend to advance a political content that can subvert the nationalisms of more powerful nations, because the cultures from which indigenous nationalisms emerge are defined by different value systems. Second, the subaltern nation "poses the commonality of a potential community."³⁶ Community becomes overcoded by the idea of the nation (the result of "modernizing," according to Hardt and Negri), and the effect is, as remarked earlier, the creation of a larger group where once there had been the many and the small.³⁷ As for the ambiguous aspects of subaltern indigenous nationalism, there are two: first, the danger of any nationalism suppressing a community's actual diversity in the name of cultural unification; and second, the contradictions that always emerge when the nation becomes the only way to imagine community. (These are also the concerns of this book you hold in your hands.) As for all of that postmodern mixing—so often characterized as automatically progressive or resistant just by virtue of its claim to impureness—Hardt and Negri identify its probable, if not all that inspirational, source:

Many of the concepts dear to postmodernists and postcolonialism find a perfect correspondence in the current ideology of corporate capital and the world market. The ideology of the world market has always been the anti-foundational and anti-essentialist discourse par excellence. Circulation, mobility, diversity, and mixture are its very

conditions of possibility. Trade brings differences together and the more the merrier! Differences (of commodities, populations, cultures, and so forth) seem to multiply infinitely in the world market, which attacks nothing more violently than fixed boundaries: it overwhelms any binary division with its infinite multiplicities.³⁸

In other terms, that dashing, hybridized, polyglot, rebellious trickster figure could very well be a souvenir from Epcot Center, just as frontier space can create rather favorable conditions for a trendy new ethnic marketplace.

X-marks have been made in every Indian space imagined since 1492 and they are now being made in the space of the *nation*. Indeed, the very idea of an Indian nation is, I argue, an x-mark. But because nation is such a large and unwieldy abstraction, too large and abstract to sustain a real community, Indian space is now being imagined in a much smaller domestic locale: the *kitchen table*. “The fires of Cherokee nationhood still burn,” writes Daniel Justice, “around the kitchen table.”³⁹ “What if we want to have a conversation just among ourselves over a cup of coffee at the kitchen table?” asks Jace Weaver.⁴⁰ And it’s not just the Cherokees, or for that matter the boys. “I remember well the experience of sitting at Chief Homer St. Francis’s kitchen table,” writes Lisa Brooks. “Many years later . . . I found myself at a lot of kitchen tables, all over Indian country.”⁴¹ Question: what explains this curious preoccupation with kitchen tables?

Perhaps the kitchen table is not so unlike a camp. After all, this space is circular, communal, and located far from cosmopolitan centers; it is pungent, warm, and slow; it is a space where people are nourished. Joy Harjo poetically memorialized this Indian space in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*: “The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, / we must eat to live” (yet she also ominously added: “Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table”).⁴² As a new Indian space (if that is what this is), the kitchen table is not so very quiet or spiritual but in fact actually seems to be a noisy site of conflict, “where everyone would be fed but that didn’t mean you were safe from confrontation. Many a fight broke out at the table, many a man was challenged.”⁴³ The kitchen table is no longhouse or tribal council chamber, but decisions and community are made in this democratic space, and in that regard it might have something in common with spaces invented by peoples migrating home in traditional time.

As symbolic of Indian space, the kitchen table may require a double hermeneutic. On the one hand, it appealingly attests to the noble and democratic desire to keep power and decision making in an everyday com-

munal site, where men, women, children, and elders can meet for fellowship and debate without stuffy formalities or imposing architectures. On the other hand, the image of a common kitchen table could erase class differences that exist in real Indian spaces. The kitchen table isn't only a feminine or domestic image, after all; it is above all a working-class image, and as such runs the risk of being romanticized. Do I really sit at the same table as my cousin just released from jail, or the homeless, or the addicted? The image of a kitchen table suggests that we do, but sitting here in my comfortable university office, I'm really not so sure about that.

I suspect that the word *rezzy* is now deployed in a similar manner to conflate ethnicity and class in a way that risks nostalgically erasing class difference "on the rez." To be *rezzy* is to be tacky but in a humorous, endearing way. Lovable losers are *rezzy*, and so are cars stuck in reverse. No one has aestheticized the *rezzy* better than the always *rezzy* Sherman Alexie. It is funny but problematic, that *rezziness*, and the same can be said of those kitchen tables. I suspect it's going to be a real challenge to imagine nations that are just as democratic and inclusive as our old-fashioned conversations at the kitchen table without acknowledging, erasing, or romanticizing social differences like class. Nonetheless, I think the image of a kitchen table is an x-mark well made.

X-marks operate in a time understood as neither linear nor "circular" but multiple and always on the move. In similar fashion, the space of the x-mark has a multiplicitous quality, having been variously invented over many years as camp, frontier, checkerboard, Indian country, subaltern nation, and *rezzy* kitchen table, and still others we haven't even mentioned (like "Fourth World"). Indian space is always overlapping with other kinds of space, and sometimes it will contest them as well. Any consideration of an x-mark should contend with this intractable multiplicity of Indian space. Further, we must always admit that space can be modernized. Indian space is never defined by tradition or culture alone because Native people migrate in modern times as well. Like it or not, X marks the spot of Indian space.

The Fourth Remove

One of Bill Lyons's best fishing guides, according to my late grandfather Aubrey Lyons, was my late grandfather Aubrey Lyons. "Aub," as he was known, was warm and gentle with children, and he was lightning fast with a joke. The first Lyons to receive American citizenship—in 1924—Aub attended an off-reservation boarding school at Flandreau, South

Dakota, from age six to fourteen and ran away four times. He had been sent there by Bill, not only because Bill wanted his children to be educated but also because Sarah, Aub's mother, had died young and left Bill with children he could not raise alone. Such was a common Indian story during the early twentieth century, because tuberculosis had raged through many Native communities in northern Minnesota and hit Bena as well. As he used to tell it, the first time Aub ran away it was because a little bird told him to do it (he never elaborated on the bird). The second and third times he brought his little sister Tootie, who wasn't older than eight. The fourth and final time was after he was cruelly whipped with a leather strap in front of a school assembly "to make an example out of me." It took him several days to make the nearly four-hundred-mile journey from Flandreau to Bena, and he was helped along the way by white people he called (with no insult intended) "hobos": homeless travelers during the Great Depression who treated an Indian kid with kindness. Aub walked and hopped trains all the way to Bena, and each time he did, save the last, his father sent him back.

No aspect of Native history has been more maligned in contemporary discourse than the boarding-school experience, or, as the historian David Wallace Adams names it, "education for extinction."⁴⁴ This story is very well known: federal authorities removed Indian children from their homes and families and sent them to harsh institutions far away, where they had their mouths washed out with soap for speaking their languages and had even worse forms of abuse inflicted upon them. This discourse is powerful. The narrative is unshakable. I remember a few years ago inviting three older Native women to speak to a class on their boarding-schooling experiences, thinking they would complicate the typical narrative of victimization. In fact, they reproduced it faithfully, to the point of breaking down into tears while recounting the awful abuses that they had to endure. Naturally, my class was horrified, as was I. Yet, during the Q & A it was revealed that the abuses the women had described did not happen to them. One who claimed she had been punished for speaking her language confessed that she actually never spoke that language, and another admitted to never having attended a boarding school at all ("but my brother did"). The narrative, it seems, had colonized the women's own personal experiences. Whether this was because of a desire to produce a certain critical discourse in the Indian space of my classroom, or to the return of a repressed historical trauma, is impossible to say. In any case, despite new scholarship on boarding schools that complicates greatly the discourse of victimization—I am thinking here of Tsianina Lomawaima's *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (1995), Brenda

Child's *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (2000), and Amanda Cobb's *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852–1949*, as well as other recent histories describing the boarding-school experience as multiple, mixed, and diverse—it will probably be a while before the boarding schools receive more complex treatment in the realm of public memory.

Complex treatment was exactly the last thing I had on my mind during my college years when I interviewed my grandfather about his classically grim experience. All of us grandkids interviewed him for paper assignments at one point or another, and we always did well on our papers. No one ever wanted to interview Aub's wife, Leona, my Dakota grandmother from the Lower Sioux Indian Community (Morton), who attended the same school ten years after my grandfather and loved it completely. "Flandreau gave me a lot at a time when I needed it," Leona told us, "and where else would I meet so many friends?" Now eighty-eight, she is still in touch with several of those friends. My grandmother was the first in my line to receive not only a high school diploma—she graduated valedictorian—but also the first higher education, attending a teacher's college and eventually becoming one of Leech Lake's first Indian teachers. Leona has been a devout Christian since childhood and was never much fun to talk to about tradition. "Indian spirits are demons!" she often warned, and literally believed. That sort of talk gets one called assimilated; on the other hand, who but an Indian would ever take Indian spirits so seriously? I spent years living with my grandparents, and for the most part Leona was strong, strict, judgmental, and sometimes absolutely authoritarian. She was the matriarch and everyone knew it. Yet she was also extremely encouraging to her grandchildren, especially when it came to educational matters. She reviewed all of my writings and attended all my school events, and she was never judgmental about any of that. She was critical in that constructive way that helped me learn. People from all over Leech Lake say that about her (and nearly everyone between the ages of thirty and sixty had to take her at some point or another). My grandfather sure had the better story when it came to the boarding schools—and his story was doubtless true—but it was my grandmother who put us kids on the path to education.

Talking Indian

We have looked at the time and space of an x-mark; we must now consider a third context—discourse—understood in the way of social scientists, Foucauldians, and lit-crit theorists: as discursive formations, or ways of

speaking that are traceable to institutions, the state, and dominant cultural understandings, and always associated with power and hierarchies. To the extent that one's freedom fighter is somebody else's terrorist (to evoke a frequently evoked example), discourse wields the great power of definition by literally setting the terms of debate. X-marks are always made in the political context of discursive formations that never emanate from organic indigenous communities. I am saying this even in the so-called age of "self-determination"; even now our discourses of Indianness are generated by institutions, the state, and the market (although it is true that more Natives than ever before can be found in these particular sites). The subaltern never speaks, because once it does, it is no longer subaltern; so we should all probably disabuse ourselves of ideas to the contrary. It is not the end of the world to admit it, but this does need admitting, especially in these tribal-nationalistic times. Let me explain.

When Columbus arrived to what quickly became the New World, he lacked a point of reference for understanding the people he saw—these folks being something of a great surprise, as we know—so he drew upon existing discourses that were already in use in Western Europe, for example, concepts and words like heathen, infidel, *indio*, and so on. Early visual representations of Natives by Theodorus de Bry and other engravers exemplified how existing discursive formations influenced what could be said and known about Indians. De Bry never visited the New World himself, but he did make numerous illustrations of Native people that simultaneously drew upon and contributed to the new discourses of Indianness. De Bry's subjects were naked, dancing, primitive, smaller, cannibalistic, and enthralled by a pagan spiritual order, all of this stereotypical knowledge dependent upon other portraits and descriptions by people like Columbus and Thomas Harriot, and all of it generated by someone who never saw his subjects with his own eyes. That didn't make his engravings "inaccurate." It made them a part of a powerful discourse that for centuries has gone by the name of "Indian."

As a discursive formation, "Indian" connected to another powerful discourse, that of savagism and civilization, which set the terms of debate regarding Indians for a very long time. Yet this binary opposition was never stable, as we learn from the work of Roy Harvey Pearce, who distinguished three basic periods in which the savagism of Indians was construed a bit differently each time. First, from 1609 to the 1770s Indians were generally described as the same as other people, as capable of sin and seduction by Satan as anyone else, and just as open to God's salvation and grace. As Krupat has written regarding this period, "The Puritan

aim, then, was to transform the Indian, to improve him as land might be improved, lifting him up from the wild state of nature to civilization and to God.”⁴⁵ Yet, around the time of the American Revolution, the attitude changed. As Pearce remarks, “The problem, then, became one of understanding the Indian, not as one to be civilized and to be lived with, but rather as one whose nature and whose way of life was an obstacle to civilized progress westward.”⁴⁶ In the third period, starting in the removal years and ending, I would suggest, in 1890—when the frontier was closed, thus eliminating the need for a savage—Indians were described in a manner that Krupat describes as the “Zero of human society”: not a changeable sort of person deserving civilization, nor even a savage that might be usefully romanticized, but simply as a sign of noncivilization: “so the Indian must vanish, for noncivilization is not life.”⁴⁷

It was always within the context of these kinds of discursive formations that real Natives spoke, and, beginning with Samson Occom at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote. To understand these Native texts requires a vigilant awareness of the discursive formations that created their contexts, as early Native writers were always acutely aware of their rhetorical contexts and addressed them accordingly, sometimes through challenging or appropriating the dominant discourses of their day. Hence, during the removal era when the dominant discourse promoted an increasingly racialized notion of Indian unchangeability, writers such as William Apess and Elias Boudinot constantly represented changeable Indians in their narratives. Likewise, at the turn of the twentieth century, when the dominant discourse dependably portrayed Indians as the “Zero of human society,” sentimentalist writers such as Charles Alexander Eastman and Gertrude Bonnin tenderly depicted Indians as extremely human indeed. Discourses can always be appropriated and challenged, even if you have to don regalia to do it (as the latter two often did), but they cannot be ignored. When the Indian speaks, it always speaks as an Indian, and it must do so in a discursive context that, thanks to colonization, is never of pure Native origin. This is why all Indian texts are x-marks.

This is also why some traditional people devise harsh restrictions regarding the writing of certain stories, songs, and other cultural fare. Perhaps this is not so widely known, but there are serious writing taboos on reservations having a strong cultural foundation, so serious in fact that people are sometimes warned to keep what I’ll call the “tribal private” private, lest the lives of their children be taken by the spirits. The tribal private does not enter Indian space. It is hidden away where it can be defended by taboos, elders, and culture cops; and the reasons for it are

purely protective. People who are invested in the survival of the tribal private are justifiably wary of discourse formations appropriating, mutilating, or in some other way destroying knowledge that has existed “since time immemorial.” Time moves very slowly in the space of the tribal private, and people generally don’t want what happens there to be recorded as a text. It would be a mistake to make too much of the line existing between Indian space and the tribal private, however. Although the idea that today’s postmodern world destroys all distinctions between inside and outside probably goes too far—there are still places in which such distinctions make sense, the tribal private among them—it nevertheless seems true that inside/outside is delineated by a dotted line at best. Things get out and things come in, and there seems to be absolutely no way to prevent that. So, if there is a “door” to be imagined between public Indian space and the tribal private, it would be best envisioned as a screen door. The goal of a cultural sovereignty movement should not be the forging of stronger doors—that would be illusory—but rather to insist that, whenever possible, one’s doors should be opened from the inside.

All Indian texts are x-marks, all texts contend with discursive contexts, and Indian space is where this all gets played out. What discourse formations set the limits of Native intellectual discourse today? For starters, the savagism/civilization binary is no longer a factor, speaking Indians are no longer a curiosity, and writing Indians are no longer seen as an inherent contradiction. This we can all take as the good news. The bad news is, given the logistics of our peculiar technological age (globalization, late capitalism, mass media, the Internet revolution, the global village, multiculturalism, etc.), and considering what the postmodernists have identified as a general lack of faith in the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment, what we would seem to be left with is a call to perform our roles as ethnic spectacles, and the greatest of these is always ethnic discontent. Rey Chow has argued that ethnicity has transformed from a modernist paradigm defined by imagery of captivity, alienation, and struggle for rights to a postmodern commoditized spectacle. Global capitalism is the culprit here, as it has spent the last several decades dismantling boundaries, shattering essences, and obliterating binary oppositions in order to open markets and put ethnic identities up for sale. What is called “diversity” and “multiculturalism” also happens to function as a “niche market” from another point of view, and this new ethnic market is the machine that now produces most of our dominant discourse formations. Dominant among these is what Chow calls (with apologies to Weber), the “protestant ethnic”:

In this context, *to be ethnic is to protest*—but perhaps less for actual emancipation of any kind than for the benefits of worldwide visibility, currency, and circulation. Ethnic struggles have become, in this manner, an indisputable symptom of the thoroughly and irrevocably mediatized relations of capitalism and its biopolitics. In the age of globalization, ethnics are first and foremost protesting ethnics, but this is not because they are possessed of some “soul” and “humanity” that cannot be changed into commodities. Rather, it is because protesting constitutes the economically logical and socially viable vocation for them to assume.⁴⁸

Capitalism has never been opposed to resistance or protest; much to the contrary, it has actually been driven by them. So the protestant ethnic serves an invaluable function: namely, justifying capitalism by demonstrating its openness and ability to self-correct. Like filling out a comment card at a restaurant, the spectacle of ethnic protest provides an example of global capitalism’s undying belief in free speech, hence protest becomes both job and divine vocation, because “the more one protests, the more work, business, and profit one will generate, and the more this will become a sign that one is loved by God.”⁴⁹

“We belong to this land,” writes Daniel Heath Justice in a 2004 essay, “Seeing (and Reading) Red: Indian Outlaws in the Ivory Tower,” adding, “we’re not guests of the Invaders, to be given access at their whim. The knowledge of Native peoples is the voice of Turtle Island that speaks closest to all humanity. This is our inheritance.”⁵⁰ Two years later in *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006), Justice characterized white Oklahoma settlers as “lawless border trash” and himself as a “Ross man,” referring to Chief John Ross, who resisted removal.⁵¹ In most Cherokee histories, Ross is typically opposed to the Treaty Party who illegally signed a bogus treaty authorizing the Trail of Tears, and the familiar story about resistant Ross and the traitorous Treaty Party is retold once again in this book. But Justice takes it in a new and dramatic direction: “When I read, years ago, that I might be related to three of the men suspected of killing John Ridge for his part in the Treaty, my heart swelled with pride and Cherokee patriotism.”⁵²

However one might characterize the killing of the Treaty Party (which included the writer Elias Boudinot)—that is, as either a murder or an execution—it is a hard fact that there was never a trial for the victims, never a chance to face their accusers and the charges against them; so the men who make Justice’s heart swell would today be called vigilantes or a death squad. Do we really wish to celebrate that sort of thing? But

there's more: in 2007, Justice published another essay (coauthored by Debra K. S. Barker) in the journal *Profession*, titled "Deep Surveillance: Tenure and Promotion Strategies for Scholars of Color." Here are a few excerpts: "Honestly evaluate your areas of potential strength and improvement."⁵³ "Be proactive, and be professional."⁵⁴ "Be a professional and respectful departmental citizen."⁵⁵ "Begin organizing your tenure dossier from the first year of appointment."⁵⁶ Finally, "you may expect that you need to establish a sustained record of excellent scholarship as well as a national or international reputation in your discipline. Institutions appreciate it when their faculty members gain increased visibility."⁵⁷

Truer words were never spoken, but a question is raised: might there be a slight contradiction in the body of Justice's written work, moving as it does from the decrying of white "Invaders" and "trash," through a Cherokee patriot's history siding with an assassination squad, before finally arriving at what is basically a self-help manual for how to get tenure? (Try picturing Frantz Fanon or Aimé Césaire publishing an essay about seven easy steps to advancing a university career, and you'll catch my drift.) On second thought, there may be no contradiction at all when viewed through the lens of the protestant ethnic; indeed, from that point of view Justice's oeuvre is refreshingly clear insofar as it reveals the logical trajectory of the spectacle of ethnic discontent as it now seems to move through academe: namely, from "Indian outlaw in the ivory tower" to a tenured professor in that same tower. To be clear, I'm not saying that Justice or any other ethnic who protests is somehow being insincere or inauthentic. As with de Bry's engravings, there is no question that accuracy is sometimes achieved (and sometimes not) in any discourse formation, and certainly the same can be said for the personal sincerity of those who produce it. What I am saying is that our dominant discourse is governed by the spectacle of the protestant ethnic, which means that dishing on the white man or cursing one's state of oppression is not necessarily or automatically an act of "resistance." To the contrary, it can actually get you tenure. Institutions do appreciate it, after all, when faculty members gain increased visibility, and in our world today few things shine so brightly as the shimmering spectacle of ethnic discontent.

All is not lost. Admitting one's participation in the present discourse formation of the protestant ethnic does not require succumbing to cynicism or pessimism; to the contrary, protestant ethnics can sometimes achieve good things for the groups and movements they inevitably represent, although these things will usually be small and changes will be incremental at best. Consider the role of what I call the "professional

Indian.” Professional Indians are people who look and speak the part and almost always represent the traditional in Indian space (but not the tribal private). They are hired by museums, schools, and universities to speak on subjects regarding history, politics, and related matters, even though in nearly every case they lack a university degree (which puts them in an exclusive class, to say the least). Professional Indians can make decent money doing this work, even at times a living, and I think we would be hard-pressed to find an example of a professional Indian who did not produce some benefit to the people she or he represents. This benefit may be visibility or something more tangible, such as a new fellowship or a grant. Professional Indians work the protestant ethnic to their advantage to get what they want, and this is not necessarily a problem.

The problem with the protestant ethnic as a discourse formation is the limitation it places on other Indian speakers, writers, and texts. All discourse formations place limitations on possible speech, so obviously we are not seeking some sort of “limitless” linguistic power here. It is more a question of which limits are in place and how they function in the public. For example, Indians may not produce prophetic discourse, by which is meant language that warns of some imminent retribution for past or present injustices. No Native jeremiads will be tolerated, for instance, referring to a prophetic discourse that has characterized a great deal of African American rhetoric (e.g., works by David Walker, Malcolm X, and Amiri Baraka), as well as the writings of Ward Churchill. Churchill’s case was particularly instructive, as it showed in the most literal way imaginable how movement away from protestant ethnic discourse toward a more prophetic discourse can not only destroy a career but actually remove one from Indian space altogether. Churchill wasn’t simply fired; he was actually transformed into a non-Indian before our unblinking eyes. An additional problem has existed since Samson Occom’s day: can the Indian utter the universal, or does ethnic protest set the limit of our speech? If the latter is true, the Indian who speaks still speaks as an Indian, and no matter what the given topic at hand, the Indian will be expected to say something about the following: *culture, tradition, heritage, land, the circle of life, colonization, resistance, suffering at the hands of the white man, whether or not gaming is good thing, and/or whether or not mascots are a bad thing*. In such a limited context as this, uttering the universal is going to be a bit difficult.

The thing to do given our present discourse formation is probably to follow the lead of our predecessors who were faced with their own daunting rhetorical contexts and limitations but spoke the universal anyway.

Apess, Boudinot, Eastman, Bonnin, as well as a host of other Native writers, always assumed the roles of public intellectuals in ways that made sense in their particular times. Sometimes it worked best to don a suit and tie and employ a Christian discourse. At other times, wearing regalia and invoking the Great Spirit seemed appropriate. But no matter what their particular occasions or adornments, Native intellectuals resisted and appropriated the dominant discourses of their times and uttered the universal anyway as a means of forcibly entering the public sphere. Another thing to do is to revisit those old “trickster” linguistic games and highlight through irony, humor, and explicit subversion the invisible presence of the dominant discourse and thereby the visible absence of the Indian who speaks. Few have done this as well as the comedian Charlie Hill, the writer Gerald Vizenor, and the artist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith; what they share is a wry commentary on discourse carrying a powerful critical pedagogy (even though the political potentials of this kind of speech are sometimes missed). Finally, while all discourses are linked to sundry other historical structures, from economy to politics, one should never forget that it is always possible that discourses can change, fail, or be outmaneuvered by accident or chance. The Indian still speaks as an Indian, yes, and this is a limitation, to be sure; but every so often an x-mark can be seen escaping from the prison house of dominant discourse.

The Fifth Remove

My grandfather Aub and his brother Ray became police officers and patrolled the reservation in search of thieves, drunks, and Red Power activists. When I was in my late twenties, Mutt Robinson from Cass Lake showed me a side of my grandfather I had never seen. “He and Ray were pretty mean to us,” Mutt said, referring to his old activist days. “Sometimes it seemed like they enjoyed roughing us up.” When I first met Dennis Banks during my thirties, he smiled and said, “I knew your grandfather.” “No doubt,” I replied. I remember hearing a lot about Dennis Banks, AIM, and Red Power when I was a boy, and nearly all of it was bad. According to my grandparents, the “AIMsters” were radicals and ne’er-do-wells who would have been better served getting haircuts than occupying public spaces like my old Head Start classroom. Leona and my great-aunt Joyce went to a single rally on the reservation and, as they told the story, stood up and exhorted male AIM leaders to “start fathering some of the children you’ve made with all of these young girls.”

Oh, how I used to cringe when hearing that story! It was even worse than Leona's telling me that Indian spirits were demons. I detested their use of the word *AIMster*, how they laughed scornfully at the silly idealism of it all, and I hated the way they dependably trotted out another story about my grandmother's cousin who tried to live like "a real old-time Indian" in the 1970s, selling everything he had and erecting a tipi in the woods but lasting only six months before the Minnesota cold compelled him to seek modern refuge. I hated that sort of talk, because, you see, I loved AIM. I remembered those young Indians with their long hair and horses—also guns—speaking a discourse that sounded more like pride than anything I had ever heard from Indians before. I wanted to get a horse of my own and ride with them to wherever it was they were going next (as it turned out, Wounded Knee).

I was too young to ride with AIM, but my father and his two brothers were not. My father spent the Red Power years raising his family and working various jobs before going to college on a scholarship when I was in elementary school. I remember well his old Smith-Corona electric typewriter tap-tap-tapping late into the night while I drifted off to sleep. He attended Bemidji State University (where one of his professors was Gerald Vizenor), and he graduated with a bachelor's degree in industrial education. Neither of his brothers finished high school; them I remember spending the Red Power years playing softball for the Minnesota Chippys, a championship team with a formidable reputation on the national Indian softball circuit. I loved watching my uncles play with the Chippys, and especially when they played white teams. Most of the Chippys had long hair and big guts and couldn't run for squat, but they sure could hit. And they always beat the white team.

My dad's youngest brother Vern socialized with Red Power activists like Mutt Robinson but never really joined them. I have never been clear as to why. "Too busy" is what Vern tells me, although memory tells me otherwise. "I never had any problem with those guys. They did some really good things." Vern is a master of the woods and lakes, having made a meager but survivable living as a trapper, hunter, fisherman, and wild rice harvester throughout his youth. He learned those skills from my grandfather, and as a form of knowledge they reach far back in time to an age when all Ojibwe men made their living that way. We no longer live in that time. Market forces eventually compelled Vern to take a job with the tribe, and now he goes to the woods and lakes when he is not too busy.

Whatever one thinks about the characters or contradictions involved with the Red Power movement, it is undeniable that it changed Indian life

significantly. Such changes, as summarized here by Alvin Josephy, Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, would include the following:

a proliferation of native newspapers, organizations, and associations supporting American Indian interests and representing Indian communities, a series of landmark tribal land claims and reservation resource rights, decisions that have reaffirmed Indian treaty rights, a legislative and judicial reaffirmation of tribal rights to self-determination and sovereignty that has opened the way for tribal economic development including casino gambling, a blossoming of cultural and spiritual renewal on many reservations and in urban Indian communities, an emerging intertribal urban Indian culture and community in U.S. cities, and an upsurge in the American Indian population as more and more Americans assert their native ancestry.⁵⁸

Every one of these developments can be characterized as modern, and we might as well call them progress. They improved the lot of Indians, and Red Power activism was their agent.

My grandparents never gave enough credit to those young people who fought racism and injustice to make a better Indian world, even though it is also true that the Red Power movement had contradictions that should not be overlooked. Although they were too busy to get involved, my father and uncles benefited from Red Power too, my dad in the form of education funding, and my uncle through a career made possible by increased federal funding for tribes. Red Power benefited me as well, not only thanks to the new educational opportunities it engendered, but also for the way it brought me to a traditional culture I did not know before. For a time in my youth I reveled in that culture and rejected everything else, but now I see it as part of a vast historical complex in the Fourth World, a structure that also must include my grandmother, grandfather, uncles, dad, Joyce, Mutt, Dennis, me, and the Minnesota Chippis. Since that irreducible tribal diversity needs a name, I wrote this text.

Make Your X-Mark

This book argues for a greater recognition of the actually existing diversity in Native America, and it further posits the suggestion that indigenous people have the right to move in modern time. That means, first, acknowledging differences that already exist in the Fourth World, and, second, seeing those differences as by-products of modernity, hence noth-

ing to be ashamed of. Native shame is rarely justified. We require a little self-forgiveness for being the people we are, and we should remember that the flip side of forgiveness is a promise. Our ancestors promised that their descendants would be part of the modern world while continuing to maintain that activist sense of community that Jace Weaver has called “communitism.”⁵⁹ Sometimes that means adopting new ways of living, thinking, and being that do not necessarily emanate from a traditional cultural source (or, for that matter, “time immemorial”), and sometimes it means appropriating the new and changing it to feel more like the old. Sometimes change can make the old feel new again. Sometimes a removal can become a migration.

I use the x-mark to symbolize Native assent to the new, and to call into question old ideas of “assimilation” and “acculturation” (at very least they get the scare quotes). The sites that most interest me are the ones that are most controversial: identity, culture, and the idea of an “Indian nation.” These are sites where x-marks are now being made; hence they are spaces where the old guards of reaction are most likely to be found. Chapter 1 examines the current proliferation of Indian identity controversies and reads them as a signifier of a larger identity crisis. Chapter 2 deals with culture and how it gets used by parties who feel the need to police its boundaries. Chapter 3 takes the idea of an Indian nation—and the nationalism that always produces that idea—seriously. Chapter 4 considers the prospects of indigenous citizenship as a force to be reckoned with in modern times. Each chapter attempts to unpack its subject by locating it in time, space, discourse, and, whenever possible, in *Ojibwemowin*.

I wrote this book because I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with the ways in which terms like *identity*, *culture*, and *nation* are used, which is to say, “naturally,” ahistorically, and with a large measure of essentialism. While it may be true that Native essentialism has been politically expedient for the way it resists incorporation into the dominant culture and settler state, and while it may be equally true that essentialism is open to readings (by highly educated cosmopolitan intellectuals like me and probably you) as “strategic,” it is also the case that the conditions of life that essentialism tries to sustain are often retrograde and unjust. When an Indian nation purges a population in its jurisdiction on grounds that it lacks certain characteristics, people actually lose their homes. When a Native religious movement that has existed for nearly five centuries is deemed unauthentic or nontraditional because its name is Christianity—even though it might well enhance the lives of the Indians who follow it—then we require a discussion about what we mean by “traditional.”

This book is interested in these sorts of issues, as you'll soon see, and it follows a question that I have long asked myself: is it possible today to envision the survival of indigenous identity, culture, and nationalization in a nonessentialistic manner?

Perhaps the thing to do is to see essentialism as part of our history, appreciate its function at certain critical junctures, but then recognize that recent indigenous gains on the world stage might well signal a new time now when Native essentialisms should be discarded, because, after all, as "ahistorical truths" they are always illusory and usually harmful. Politically, this investigation will be nobody's manifesto. To the extent that it resembles theory, it is clearly more polytheistic than monotheistic. Nevertheless, I have tried to call it as I see it, and what I usually see when I look at Native America and the indigenous world—indeed, when I look into the mirror—is an x-mark.