

BEDTIME RADICALISM



BEYOND
OPERATION
OLYMPICS

*written by Radical Black Dreamer
illustrated by Soleada*

LEAVING OPPRESSION OLYMPICS BEHIND

In a country of 320 million people where 99% of the population is oppressed by some systemic inequality i.e., racism, patriarchy, ableism, homophobia, etc. It can feel easy to have one's struggle lost amongst the multiple calls for justice that ring throughout the streets. This anxiety pushes many people toward the pitfalls of exceptionalism. People begin to believe that their struggle is somehow more severe and exceptional than the normal level of suffering that occurs in our world. This claim isn't to take away from the reality of other people suffering but it is a realization that the attention economy demands a focal point; and in fearing being marginalized amongst the marginalized we make a variety of claims for the center.

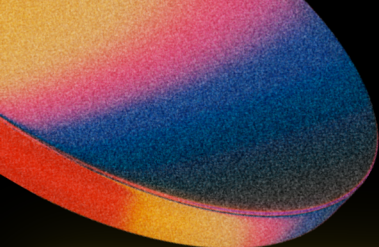
People have dubbed this "oppression Olympics". While the phrase is catchy, it's a dangerous misnomer. Olympics connotes a competition between the oppressed for the top/center. While some organizations definitely compete for funding and attention; the vast majority of revolutionaries and theorists do not create a hierarchy of suffering. Even the most exceptionalist of theories like afro-pessimism or incommensurability do not deny or shrink the suffering of others. Rather than compete for the most oppressed these theories are simply trying to highlight the differences that exist between their oppression and the oppression of other groups. This move isn't inherently hierarchical because it doesn't give primacy to one struggle. Simply it requires readers to accept that solving your own problems will not solve my problems too.

While I have some issues with afro-pessimism, incommensurability, settler-colonialism, etc. and question the efficacy of making these divisions, I do think it is important we leave oppression Olympics talk in the past. All serious activist & scholars are making claims more complex than "I suffer more than you" and if we want to build working coalitions then we must learn to read and hear each other in good faith.

The following section is a short passage from the first chapter of the book *Otherwise Worlds Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*. This section discusses how one might explore the relationship between anti-blackness and settler colonialism without collapsing them into the same thing. I believe this text can serve as a platform for moving beyond oppression Olympics and toward a more relational, even if exceptional relationship.

- Radical Black Dreamer

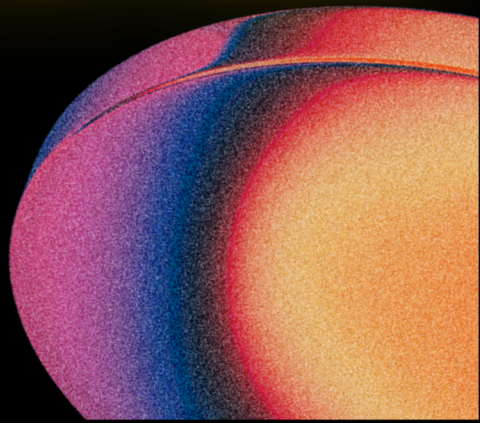




THE



BEYOND



BEYOND INCOMMENSURABILITY TOWARD AN OTHERWISE STANCE ON BLACK AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY

*Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro &
Andrea Smith*

The relationship between Native genocide and anti-Blackness has been articulated sometimes in terms of presumed solidarity or comparison, such as the notion that Native peoples harbored runaway slaves and that Black fugitives assisted Native peoples in armed struggle against settler encroachment. Sometimes it has been articulated in terms of antagonism, such as the focus on Native peoples who owned slaves and on enslaved or indentured Black people who participated in settler raids on Native nations. Nowadays, it seems to be in terms of incommensurability, which asserts a lack of commonality/relationality between Black and Native folks. This project emerges from us thinking that all of these modes are insufficient. While certainly solidarity, antagonism, and incommensurability are distinct and no one mode of relationality can be presumed, at the same time it is illogical to presume we can talk about any mode without doing it in a relationship with one another. If we submit momentarily to the popular position that Black and Native peoples and, by extension, Black and Native politics are at an impasse represented by their incommensurability, then the #ip side of being stuck together—or this stuckness—is already a form of relationality. As a result, we think Édouard Glissant's "relation" seems to be a helpful starting point: Relation . . . does not act upon prime elements that are separable or reducible. If this were true, it would itself be reduced to some mechanics capable of being taken apart or reproduced. It does not precede itself in its action and presupposes no a priori. It is the boundless effort of the world, to become realized in its totality, that is to evade rest. One does not first enter Relation, as one might enter a religion. One does not first conceive of it the way we have expected to conceive of Being.





It seems that much analysis of the relationship between Indigenous genocide/settler colonialism and anti-Blackness tends to be prescriptive in that the analysis presumes a certain prescribed politic—whether it be a call for solidarity in a certain way or a call to reject solidarity. But analysis of relationality suggests something otherwise—that the relationality between genocide and anti-Blackness is not fixed and easily knowable. In addition, to borrow from Antonio Viegó's *Dead Subjects*, there is an imperative in the academy to make Native peoples knowable and to presume that Black peoples are already known thus, not surprisingly, the relationship between the two is presumed to be fully representable and it keeps Black and Indigenous communities in isolation from one another, which is a settler desire/ dream. #us, we would prefer an approach that does not presume an “answer” but instead seeks to ask questions about the complexities of this relation, and hence the political possibilities that emerge from asking these questions and engaging in the process of relation. this desire not to presume an answer mediates any attempt to trace a genealogy to this conversation with the respective fields of Native studies and Black studies because to tell a story of either field tends to prescribe the outcome of any conversation between the fields. For instance, we could trace the development of Native studies through the influential work of Elizabeth Cook- Lynn's “Who Stole Native Studies” and Winona Stevenson's “‘Ethnic’ Assimilates ‘Indigenous.’” these works argued that Native studies should distance itself from ethnic studies (and presumably from Black studies by extension) because otherwise the field of ethnic studies would relegate Native peoples to a racial minority status rather than as peoples seeking decolonization. Cook-Lynn and Wheeler contended that engaging Native studies with ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, and so on, which do not share a concern for the liberation of Native peoples, could have the effect of domesticating Native studies into a multi-culturalist project of representation within the academy instead of one that defended Native nations' claims to sovereignty.

**MAY
DAY**

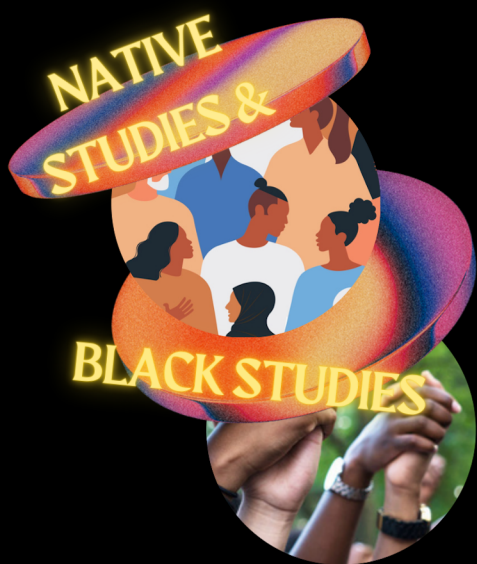
If our people
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a powerful fist.



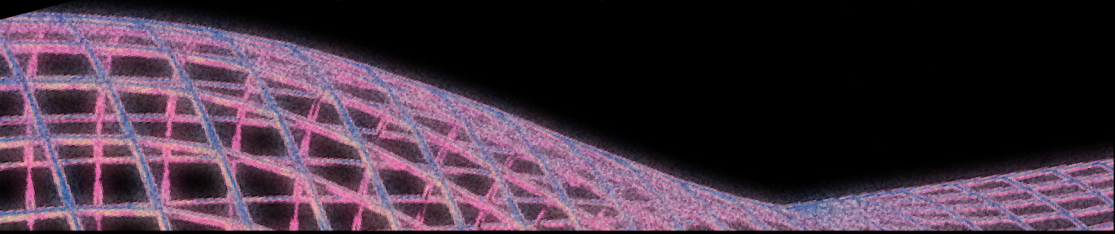
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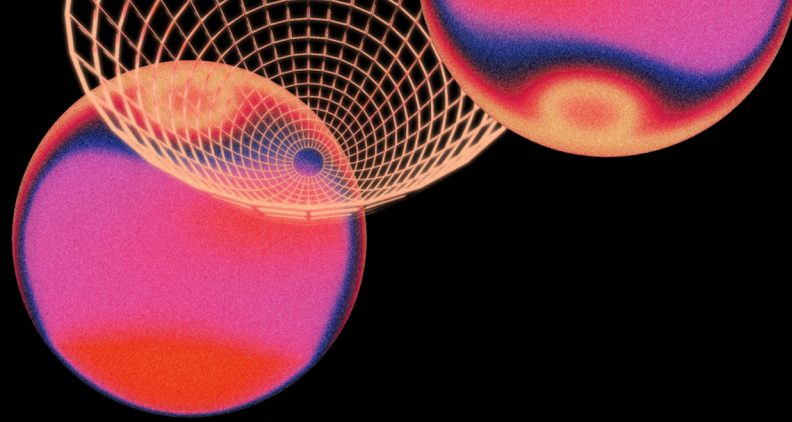
PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL O'NEILL. ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL O'NEILL. MAY 1-7, 2000. A COMMITTEE TO ABOLISH MAY DAY.





While there is much to be gained by tracing the genealogy of Native studies through these works, how does this genealogy presume that Black studies (or ethnic studies generally speaking) is fundamentally about articulating a racial minority status? Or we could center the work of Lee Maracle and Roberto Mendoza who argued that Native people and Native studies needed to be in conversation with radical political thought emerging from all sectors of society. Such a genealogy would more easily enable a conversation between Native studies and other fields of thought. At the same time, their work often presumed a more Marxist framework as the point of conversation between Native studies and other fields. "thus, we wonder what might be enabled differently from a conversation that began from different theoretical assumptions?" The point here is not to disparage the importance of these works. Rather, it is to say that to delimit the fields of Native studies and Black studies is to delimit the possibilities of conversations between the two. And to have this conversation is to simultaneously open up what the fields of Native studies and Black studies can be. Similarly, mapping genealogies of Black studies might also work to stifle emergent, lesser known, and otherwise conversations between the two fields. For one, the task of periodizing the field and charting its geographic coordinates is already a contested project. Further, attending to how multiple forms and practices of Black study have turned their scholarly attention to Indigenous peoples might privilege some forms of knowledge production and their political projects over others. The aforementioned project requires a project of its own.





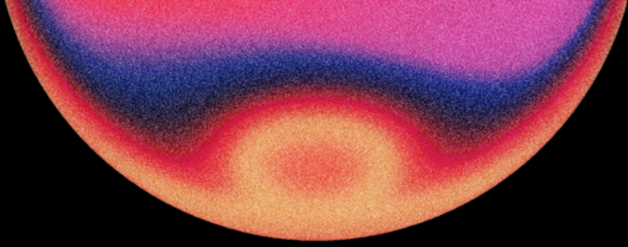
For example, Arika Easley-Houser examines antebellum African American print culture (newspapers, political speeches, David Walker's Appeal) in order to track the ways African American writers thought and talked about Native Americans in the nineteenth century.⁵ Easley-Houser argues that several different political projects, ranging from ones that sought alliances with Native peoples to comparative projects that tried to prove African American superiority to Native peoples and even investigations of Native practices of enslavement, motivated Black nineteenth-century writing on Native peoples.⁶ Shortly after founding the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in 1915, Carter G. Wood[1]son authored the article "the Relations of Negroes and Indians in Massachusetts" in 1920 in the *Journal of Negro History*. "throughout the twentieth century there were intermittent attempts on the part of Black individuals and institutions to document and study Black and Native histories and exchanges in America. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, militant anti-imperialist and anticapitalist activism animated by the Black Power movement in the US and "third World internationalism birthed the first Black studies programs. "the strong ties between Black activism and the development of academic departments created fertile ground for conversations between Black and Native scholars and activists. Revisiting Black, Native, and ethnic studies' radical roots encourages a commemoration of histories of solidarity and shared struggle while it also exposes the pressure that universities put on fields like Black studies to "define" itself and distinguish itself from other ethnic studies programs like Native studies. In 1974, Robert Allen wrote about the ways that Black studies and ethnic studies were being "counter-posed" and forced into an "antagonistic relationship" with one another in the academy.⁷ While this genealogical approach thus far has limited itself to Black studies in the US, recounting this history helps expose the ways that the settler colonial university worked (and continues) to pit "fields like Black and Native studies against one another and prevent generative dialogue. After the establishment of Black studies departments, a noticeable uptick in scholarship by Black scholars on Black and Native American relations emerged after Jack D. Forbes's book *Africans and Native Americans: the Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* was published in 1993. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, several Black historians (Sharon Holland; Barbara Krauthamer; Tiya Miles; Celia Naylor; Fay Yarborough) have written books dedicated to the study of Black and Indigenous people in the Southeastern United States. Scholars began to pay particular attention to the practice of slavery among the Five Civilized Tribes.

Human beings are magical.
Bios and Logos. Words made
flesh, muscle and bone
animated by hope and desire,
belief materialized in deeds,
deeds which crystallize our
actualities

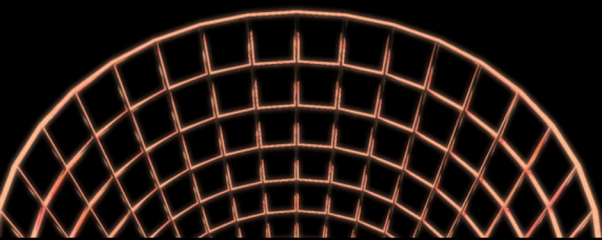


Sylvia Wynter

In 2006, Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland coedited the anthology *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: the African Diaspora in Indian Country*. The contributors to the collection used a variety of interdisciplinary methods and rooted their work in primary sources, archival records, and Black and Native literary traditions that told stories of Black and Native relations in North America. *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds* emerged around the same time that the emergent "eld of (white) settler colonial studies was beginning to take shape in Australia and would eventually gain currency in North America. In the wake of Miles and Holland's *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds*, Frank B. Wilderson III authored one of the first interdisciplinary Black studies texts that introduced a theoretical frame for elaborating the complex structural and ontological—political, economic, and libidinal—positions of Black and Native people in the United States. While Wilderson's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (2010) represents an important intellectual moment and opening for a discussion of Black and Red relations, the book—and his writings of late—trouble the notion that Black and Indigenous people can be in coalition with one another or even communicate with one another within the terms and parameters of academic and humanist discourse. Calling attention to the problems of humanist frames of interpretation like sovereignty, land, coloniality, and decolonization, Wilderson and Jared Sexton continue to argue for incommensurability. While this political and ontological impasse continues to shape contemporary academic dialogue, Black studies projects in Canada and the Caribbean offer different points of engagement and itineraries for thinking about Black and Indigenous relations. A Black studies' reading practice that also attends to African diaspora studies as they unfold in the Caribbean and South America has the conceptual space to acknowledge philosophical, literary, and historical traditions that can attend to histories of both enslavement and colonialism.



Black and African diaspora scholarship that emerges from the Caribbean and Central and South America directly engages questions of coloniality from theoretical and experiential perspectives. For example, Sylvia Wynter's body of work that traces the "epistemic revolutions" of Western humanism attends to the ways that Blacks (Negroes) and Indigenous (Indios) are made and remade as a perpetual limit point or outside to the boundaries of Man across various colonial formations. Rinaldo Walcott's chapter in this collection draws on this Wynterian tradition in order to elaborate the ways that the Canadian nation-state's project of multiculturalism, which expands to incorporate modes of Indigenous representation into its notion of the human/Man, does so at the expense of Black subjects in Canada. Shona Jackson's book *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* interrogates the vestiges of humanist violence in the modernist onto-epistemology of labor as a civilizing and modernizing agent for Afro-descended creole subjects in the Caribbean.⁹ The Hegelian and colonial holdover that valorizes labor traps Black subjects within limited notions of agency and emancipation as it erases Indigenous subjectivity in Guyana. Wynter's critique of humanism and its systems of overrepresentation has functioned as a crucial pivot point in Black studies that has enabled some scholars to break up the theoretical impasse presented by Afro-pessimist scholars like Wilderson and Sexton. Wynter's attack on the foundations of humanism itself allows for the emergence of a shared critique to emerge between Black and Native studies. Scholar and coeditor Tiffany Lethabo King, who takes Wynter's lead in her own work and focuses on interrogating the invention of the human, finds that this mode of critique also functions as a space of convergence for the fields of Black and Native studies. Rather than focus on genealogies or origin stories, *Otherwise Worlds* hopes to model practices of reading and listening that create new possibilities for thinking of, caring for, and talking to one another.





BEHIND BATHROOM

Questions? Comments? Email me
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