

# **Solarize-ing Native hip-hop: Native feminist land ethics and cultural resistance**

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## **Abstract**

In this article I focus in-depth on what constitutes cultural resistance within the genre of Native Hip-Hop. Rather than examining multiple songs and artists I have chosen to focus on one recent Native hip-hop song titled “Solarize” which was created in 2013 through United Roots Oakland (a youth center for green arts and media) by Desirae Harp (Mishewal Wappo Tribe of the Alexander Valley), Fly50, and SeasunZ. I argue that the collective work in this song moves us closer to developing a Native feminist land ethic which privileges living *with* the land rather than *over* the land; and, at the level of praxis, their song builds alliance with, rather than isolation from, Black communities. Therefore, the song represents the productive move of employing what Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith have called “theoretical promiscuity” through hip-hop music and culture.

**Keywords:** *hip-hop studies; Indigeneity; cultural studies; environmental ethics; feminism*

## Introduction to Native hip-hop

*“My heart is in the water / My heart is in Mother Earth / My heart is in the strong winds / My heart is in all my relations.” – Desirae Harp, “Solarize” (2013)*

*“Our knowledge comes from the land, and the destruction of the environment is a colonial manifestation and a direct attack on Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous nationhood.”  
– Leanne Simpson (2004)*

From its emergence in the late 1970s, hip-hop has been a musical genre and cultural form that has responded to various forms of racism, class inequities, and systemic state violence; and, in the early 1980s, Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five’s song “The Message” was one example of hip-hop music that specifically responded to structural and environmental racism in New York. Their song resonated with a generation of listeners that felt the material effects of such racism and oppression that had become more sophisticated in light of the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Native hip-hop also emerged in order to respond to similar concerns in the 1980s with groups like Without Rezervation, and it continues to be one of the latest culturally specific forms of hip-hop that uses music and culture as a means to voice opposition to structural and environmental racism, poverty, and oppression in the United States. In one of the latest Native hip-hop songs, titled “Solarize” by Desirae Harp (Mishewal Wappo Tribe of the Alexander Valley), Fly50, and SeasunZ, Harp and her collaborators work to foreground a Native feminist land ethic with respect to environmental issues, while also building alliances with Black communities in the Bay Area and, by extension, other Black communities in the United States through hip-hop music.

Of course, hip-hop music and culture, since the late 1970s, has taken on different forms and shifted and re-shifted its foci. Not all hip-hop music and culture functions with the same political consciousness. One of the most popular strains of hip-hop focuses on acquiring material wealth, representing women as objects to be similarly acquired and possessed, and abandons the early mission of hip-hop: to give voice to and represent the conditions of poverty and oppression suffered by inner city Black (including many Caribbean immigrant youth) and Puerto Rican youth. Run DMC’s “My Adidas” (1986) marks one of the earliest examples of this commercialization of hip-hop and the capitalist logics that infiltrated the genre; and, later Nelly’s hit song “Tip Drill” (2003) served as another infamous example of one of the most egregious ways hip-hop commodifies women—especially women of color. Obviously, these commercialized strains of hip-hop have generated a great deal of debate about the role and

function of hip-hop that have been critiqued by experts in the field of Hip-Hop Studies like Tricia Rose, Murray Forman, and Mark Anthony Neal.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the original strain of politically conscious hip-hop remains a constant force of the music and cultural genre, and continues to be a useful and powerful medium for responding to injustice. Hip-hop has in fact become such a powerful force for redress and for speaking truth to power that many different communities have found resonance with the genre and adopted it. Latino hip-hop artists like Kid Frost and Immortal Technique use hip-hop to speak to the particular oppression that Latinas/os face in the United States and throughout the Americas and Native American hip-hop artists also use the genre to articulate their positionalities with respect to large-scale oppression and continued colonization in the United States that is particular to Indian country.

In fact, at this moment, we are witnessing an incredible rise of Native hip-hop. The Aboriginal People's Choice Music Awards for 2013 recently highlighted the importance and popularity of many innovative rap artists and groups. Rellik's "Idle No More" won Best Music Video, the album *Redwinter* by Drezus won Best Rap/Hip-Hop CD, and Lightning Cloud took home the Best New Artist award. And, of course, one can hardly invoke Native hip-hop in 2014 without pointing to A Tribe Called Red who took home Best Group, Best Album Cover (for their album *Nation II Nation*), and Best Producer for 2013. Also, other popular media sources are highlighting the work of Native rappers. For example, Tall Paul (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe) was recently "roasted" by Dave Chapelle, and Crow rapper, Supaman, was just granted the title of "MTV's Artist of the Month" for March 2014. Therefore, contrary to the national imagination and its perception of Native musical productions, our communities are not solely tied to flute music or drumming circles. Native musical productions are diverse and quite expansive, and include multiple varieties of music even within genres.

In this article, I will focus in-depth on what constitutes cultural resistance within the genre of Native hip-hop. However, I should be clear that while Native hip-hop artists also produce mainstream music for the purpose of capitalist consumption and reproduce many of the troubling discourses of mainstream hip-hop, that form of hip-hop is not the music analyzed here. Instead, my aim is to examine the poetics and politics of Native hip-hop that continues the resistant strain of early hip-hop that was committed to speaking truth to power, giving voice to the voiceless, and highlighting the injustices that people face in the United States. Fly50, SeasonZ, and Harp's "Solarize", created in 2013 through United Roots Oakland (a youth center for green arts and media), is the latest primary example of such hip-hop songs and, as a result, is the focus of this article. As noted above, the artists collectively shape the song to move us closer to developing a Native feminist land ethic; and, at the level of praxis, their song builds an alliance between Black and Native communities, and, therefore, represents the productive move of employing what Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith in their new collection titled *Theorizing*

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<sup>1</sup> To explore the field of Hip-Hop Studies via these two authors see Tricia Rose's foundational book titled *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994), and Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal's *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (2011).

*Native Studies* (2014) have called “theoretical promiscuity.” Simpson and Smith argue that theoretical promiscuity asserts that intellectual sovereignty should not be relegated to intellectual isolationism, and moreover, they contend that this theoretical framework “is a coalitional intellectual project that seeks to assess the intersecting logics of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism” (p. 13). Namely, the world is affected by the abuses of settler colonialism so we need as many alliances as possible to end these dominant genocidal tactics.

## “Solarize” and land ethics

The video and song begins with Desirae Harp walking into one of the abandoned buildings on the Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, CA. As she reaches the top of the building, she looks out over the Naval shipyard, seemingly to consider the history and context of such a place (See Figure 1.1). The very next scene shows her wandering among the rubble of the shipyard and then shifts between focusing on the surrounding streets that look like they have suffered the effects of militarization, to finally focusing on a set of beautiful red wildflowers that adorn the same street. Then, the scene refocuses on Desirae Harp as she reaches out to touch the flowers and a voiceover begins of her reciting a poem; this voiceover is the first introduction to any lyrics of the song. Harp’s poetic introduction and the visual survey of Mare Island are both introduced as foundational elements of the song and foreground the core of its message. She begins by saying: “My heart is in the water/ My heart is in Mother Earth/ My heart is in the strong winds/ My heart is in all my relations” (“Solarize”, 2013). Harp’s lyrics and the visual toggling between the blight of the shipyard and the beautiful wildflowers not only provide the foundation for the rest of the song, but they simultaneously announce its Native feminist ethics, which I will explicate momentarily.



Figure 1.1: “Solarize” Music Video Screenshot. Desirae Harp walks across Mare Island Naval Shipyard (2013).

Additionally, these lyrics function as more than a simple introduction to the song—they are also used as a hook throughout the song for Indigenist emphasis and narrative cohesion. However, Harp sings these lyrics in Wappo rather than in English throughout the remainder of the song. As a result, the use of Wappo in “Solarize” moves the theoretical foundations of the song beyond Native language recovery and offers another intelligibility to this space as it subtly, yet powerfully, opposes the military and imperial history and negative effects of Mare Island on Native communities. In short, weaving these Wappo lyrics through the song as a hook symbolizes a rootedness in a Native worldview expressed by Harp that seeks to give new/different life to the island. Importantly, as Leanne Simpson (2004) has argued, the speaking and teaching of Indigenous languages is a vital anticolonial strategy and highly connected to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (p. 373-378). These visual and sonic representations, along with the Indigenous Knowledge announced, are integral and foundational to the entire song and video.

The rest of the video focuses on interchanges between Fly50, Harp, and SeasunZ, and provides a bridge that articulates another Native feminist understanding of the current conditions of U.S.-Indigenous relationships as they are represented by Mare Island. This is symbolized by Harp and her mother as they hold each other while walking away—presumably off the island—after planting a small green plant in the middle of the abandoned military base (see Figure 1.2). The representation of life, both through the generational connectedness between Harp and her mother and the small plant, oppose the destruction of Mare Island. Harp and her mother not only frame the song/video, but they are central to it and the structural life of it.



Figure 1.2: “Solarize” Music Video Screenshot. Desirae Harp and her mother at Mare Island Naval Shipyard (2013).



The lyrics in the bridge of the song, also sung by Harp, move us in the direction of understanding a Native feminist analytic as central to developing a “radical relationality” with the land on this site and beyond. Andrea Smith (2012) has adeptly argued, “if we understand Native identity as spatially rather than temporally based, claims to the land are based not solely on prior occupancy but on a radical relationality to land” (p. 83). This relationship, theorized from a Native feminist analysis by Smith, is built around an ethical responsibility to the land. Moreover, as Mishuana R. Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale explain the importance of Native feminist analysis, they say, “In order to decolonize, we must critically assess our present state and name the reasons that Native peoples continue to live at the margins...and we must account for the state of our homelands” (2009, p. 9). This accounting of the pervasiveness and persistence of colonialism, particularly its manifestations of racism and sexism, are the cornerstones of a Native feminist analysis. I also note that a Native feminist approach is not solely tied to identity. In fact, it is best understood and posited as an analytic. As Goeman and Denetdale also assert, “there is no one definition of Native feminism; rather, there are multiple definitions and layers of what it means to do Native feminist analysis” (2009, p. 10). While the body of foundational work on Native feminisms has employed different definitions to explain it, there has been substantial consensus around the idea that a Native feminist approach is vital to the process of decolonization. In this vein, I frame “Solarize” through a Native feminist analytic because it: 1) circulates a relational stance with the land, 2) reimagines the role of art and artists in the healing process of decolonization, and 3) fundamentally links Native sovereignty and Black sovereignty to one another.

“Solarize” not only builds a land ethic with the opening lines I mentioned and the hook, but such a position is also found in the middle of the song/video, when Desirae Harp sings about the broader history of environmental racism as tied to imperialism and colonization and its subsequent codification in our legal and social systems in the Americas. She sings:

The Doctrine of Discovery  
used in mundane policy.  
Seizing our claimed property.  
Blood rolled up inside the deeds.  
Sovereign nations lose their homes.  
Oil spills and Chevron grows...  
Legal permits to pollute the earth.  
Stock markets? Don't know the worth.  
Factories pump out toxic clones—  
Troops protect their walls with guns.  
Fruits of resistance cross the lines,  
Exposing a stream of lies. (2013)

The lyrics of this verse specifically point to white settler conquest of land and people historically, and are especially poignant as they are sung on a former U.S. military base. But these lyrics also span across time to assert the continued practices of literal and cultural genocide of Native people in the U.S. Nonetheless, the song's verses ultimately place cultural resistance at the forefront of revolutionary efforts to relate differently and ethically to the land and to each other. These ethics are most visible at the end of the verse when Harp suggests that "Fruits of resistance cross the lines" and "Expos[e] a stream of lies" ("Solarize", 2013). The song, therefore, asserts the need for collaboration through the arts—in this case, hip-hop—to enact a process of decolonization. Thus, "Solarize" has not left it to the settler state to shape and assert a much needed land ethic, since it is the apparatus that sanctions the "legal permits to pollute the earth" ("Solarize", 2013). Rather, the song articulates an ethical approach to the land itself and makes efforts to disseminate such ethics through acts of cultural resistance using Native hip-hop as a site to conduct this work.

Obviously, some might ask: What potential does a song like this offer to the development and implementation of land ethics? The answer, of course, is that expressive Native art and thought like that witnessed in "Solarize" stand to creatively disseminate a land ethic across generations, different tribal communities, and perhaps even to non-Native communities because of the cultural crossover potential of hip-hop as a musical form. Moreover, one might ask: How could we possibly couple Native land ethics and hip-hop? In order to respond fully to this question, it is necessary to examine how the imaginative and creative capacities of Native hip-hop offer insights on how young Native artists position their art in relationship to the land. It is also useful to underscore some of the recent work on Native land ethics *and* Native feminisms to point to what I am calling a *Native feminist land ethic*.

## Native feminist land ethics

*"Strugglin' to just be who I am / denied a presence in my own land / but, better things are gonna happen / you know I gotta keep on rapp'n."—Julian B., "Once Upon A Genocide"*

Many Native and non-Native scholars have written about land use practices and land tenure in Native Studies. Some of these scholars have adeptly argued that the world is desperately in need of a clear and developed land ethic if we are to shift away from the current demise of the environment and if we are to continue to contest the settler colonial and capitalist approach to land management. However, it has yet to be fully examined how a Native feminist analytic might press us to also re-envision the actions that should constitute good stewardship practices. And such initial examinations also force us to ask: What does a Native feminist lens bring to the discussion on land ethics? How might a Native feminist land ethic situate our relationship to the land differently than other arguments about land ethics? How does a Native feminist land ethic push beyond contestations of "conservation" and "protection" to consider more liberating forms

of living *with* the land rather than *over* the land? And, finally, how does a Native feminist land ethic challenge the land management strategies that are bound to the law? In fact, I assert that the embodiment of a Native feminist land ethic would actually be one that is *against* the law rather than one that continues to demand recognition from the federal government to *uphold* the law.

A Native feminist analytic is useful to formulating these types of land ethics because its primary aim is to disrupt settler colonialist logics and force ideological/decolonial reorientations. Therefore, one of the primary interventions of a Native feminist land ethic is to move beyond a reliance on the settler state to build a relationship of respect with the land. A Native feminist land ethic, therefore, challenges all of us to build alliances across Native and non-Native communities, and to enact a radical relationality with the land that transcends the settler state's power and processes of recognition and legitimation (e.g. the borders that divide communities, towns, neighborhoods, and nations). Significantly, due to the history of the land being incredibly gendered as female and thus seen as "penetrable," "rapable," and ultimately in need of domination, a Native feminist land ethic challenges the sexist discrimination grafted onto the land through settler colonialism.<sup>2</sup>

The "Solarize" video embodies an artistic praxis of a radical relationality to land ethics. As a consequence, this ethic, rather than relying solely on the law to uphold promised treaties that relate to the land, is centered on alliance-building and community-building in order to disrupt the colonizing/capitalist privileging of land ownership, staunch individualism, and agriculturalist approaches that place the land in a subordinate, exploitable relationship to people. This relationality with the land then is necessarily *dialogic* and it means that we must not only listen to one another about land use and tenure, but we must actually learn to listen to the land. If in fact as Echo-Hawk (2009) has beautifully suggested, "the land can speak to those who listen" (p. 58), then it is non-productive to assume it will be the settler state that is capable of listening in a dialogic and participatory process that it has historically shown to ignore, which is unfortunately the argument he makes after this statement.

Not only does a Native feminist land ethic challenge the settler state and history of understanding the land as gendered, but I also understand this ethic to be one that aims to uphold Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Leanne Simpson's work on TEK is especially important to note. In "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge" (2004), she shows how scientists in the United States have become increasingly interested in TEK as a resource because they claim it "hold[s] answers to the environmental problems afflicting modern colonizing societies" (p. 373-374). At the same time, Simpson aptly notes that these same scientists have divested interest in the spiritual foundation of TEK, namely, they are not interested in Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems because these systems stand in opposition to white supremacist values (p. 374). This privileging of Western knowledge over TEK or IK underscores a "continuing colonial mentality" (p. 375) that fails to find solutions to

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<sup>2</sup> To read full histories of the gendering of the land see Anne McClintock's seminal book titled *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995) or Andrea Smith's chapter in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005) titled "Rape of the Land."



our modern environmental and ecological problems primarily because the non-Native scientists who carry out this work exploit TEK as a resource for their use (p. 376). She argues that what scientists ultimately fail to recognize is that colonization intervened in the traditional practice of receiving knowledge from the land because it displaced Native people from their homelands and led to environmental destruction (p. 377). Ultimately, Simpson contends, “The land is humiliated, and since Indigenous Peoples and our knowledge is part of the land, we all suffer” (p. 379). Therefore, the counter to this environmental approach is a Native feminist land ethic that hinges around self-determination and sovereignty with the land by holding TEK at the center.

Furthermore, a Native feminist land ethic seeks to break down the dichotomous reservation versus urban realities that relate to the land. As a result, within this framework, it is possible to imagine a Native feminist land ethic that can be maintained across space and time—including Mare Island, the city of Vallejo, and other urban spaces occupied by urban Indians. Namely, it is possible to form and implement a land ethic that is carried out in urban *and* non-urban landscapes. This framework for a land ethic is also significant because Native wisdom traditions central to the land are vital parts of *both* urban and reservation life. In Mishuana R. Goeman’s article, “(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature,” she argues, “Colonial spatializing of our lands, bodies, and minds has occurred since contact: maps, travel logs, engravings, newspapers, almanacs, and many other forms of colonial writings formed a systematic practice of confining and defining Native spaces from land to bodies” (2008, p. 296). Her term “colonial spatializing” draws attention to “nationalist discourses that ensconce a social and cultural sphere, stake a claim to a people, and territorialize the physical landscape by manufacturing categories and separating land from people” (p. 296). Because of this embedded colonial practice of constructing space in order to dominate Native lands and bodies, it is critical to recognize the ways in which Native people envision and actualize Native space. It is also important not to reproduce and recognize as inherently legitimate these same colonizing divisions.

Goeman also asserts, “Conceiving of Native spaces that encourage the dismantling of boxed geographies and bodies defies the Cartesian subject status” (p. 295). She understands the Cartesian subject status, not only through the traditional emergence of the self as a conscious subject (“I think; therefore I am”), but she also critiques the isolation and abstraction of such subjectivity from particular histories, geographies, and imperial orders (p. 295). As a result, my articulation of a Native feminist land ethic builds on Goeman’s work to contend that we must come to consciousness with the land, with history, and with our social surroundings much in the same way as is illustrated by the video “Solarize.” Therefore, this Native feminist orientation to the land respects multiple Native land traditions and bodies, thus, coming to consciousness with the land takes place in community rather than some individual awakening or sense of self that is created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

The chorus of “Solarize” as sung by SeasunZ and Desirae Harp poignantly illustrates this process of coming to consciousness and embodying a Native feminist land ethic through building

community. The artists sing, “I try to ignore the pain / gone too far to forget how / we ended up in this place / our world is changing / the doors approaching / the earth is hoping / we open up our eyes / and let’s all be solarized” (“Solarize”, 2013). In community with many others, Harp, her mother, Fly 50, and SeasunZ band together at this point in the song—the climax of the video—and suggest they are listening to the land; they collectively come to consciousness with the land and literally hold hands as a young girl plants new life on the grounds of the military base. There is also a dialogue that is taking place between these artists and the land as they assert, “the earth is hoping” for the change that they will bring suggesting there are moral implications within the land itself.

Importantly, at this moment in the song/video, the lyrics and singers represent a shift from the ego-centrism, consumption, and history that created the blight on which they stand in the naval shipyard. They note the “I” that tries “to ignore the pain” but has “gone too far to forget how/ we ended up in this place” (“Solarize”, 2013). This shift from the first person singular voice, to the third person plural voice in the chorus and climax of the song, indicates a similar shift toward a collective consciousness that is integral to a Native feminist land ethic. To further reinforce this particular ethic, the visual focal point at the time of this shift revolves around a young Native girl who positions a new plant in the middle of the base—both of whom suggest new possible futures.

The lyrics above also ascribe a level of affect to the land demonstrating, as Native feminist scholar Dian Million has argued, that Native peoples “*feel* our histories as well as think them” (p. 54). Akin to Million’s felt theory, I suggest that feelings are not usually established alone. They are often dialogic and even processual. In a recent 2013 article entitled “All the Eagles and Ravens in the House Say *Yeah*: (Ab)Original Hip-Hop, Heritage, and Love” Lauren Jessica Amsterdam speaks about Native hip-hop artists and affect by asserting these young artists are “spreading love” (p. 54). Moreover, she argues, “Rather than mourn who they would or could have been if the past were different, artists orient themselves towards the potentiality of the future through self-love and communal care, shedding the settler nation’s inculcation of shame and alienation” (p. 54). Thus, the line in the chorus about the “hope of the earth” asks us in a similar fashion to consider what role affect/feeling may play in establishing a Native feminist land ethic. And, as the artists question how we ended up in this particular space/place in the chorus, the song also asks us to think about both our history and our future. It is possible, given the video’s entry points, to understand Native arts as a primary mode for developing land ethics, and as multiple Native hip-hop artists engage in the positive work of disrupting the presence of the settler state, they bring us closer to a Native feminist land ethic.

In another article by Goeman titled “Notes toward a Native Feminism’s Spatial Practice,” she points out how “native spatial practice is as much about the future as the past” (2009, p. 179). Throughout this article Goeman explicates the ways in which a Native feminist approach to land and spatiality moves beyond the heteropatriarchal settler state’s “imaginative geographies” of Native communities. These geographies, as Goeman argues, “create the material consequences of everyday existence for Native people even while the historical onslaught of

legislation continues to rip that grounding out from under Native people” (p. 170). Here, the settler state’s “imaginative geography” works to isolate urban Native communities from reservation communities as a mechanism to continue to control Native lands and culture; namely, this is a strategy of the settler state to perpetuate its white supremacist genocidal project. Moreover, I too suggest, as Goeman does above, that the law has historically worked to undermine Native land practices. We can point to many pieces of legislation including Removal, Allotment, and Relocation policies where this has been the case. The Marshall Trilogy laws provide another pertinent example in the past where the fiduciary relationship established by the U.S. Supreme Court has led many Native nations into relationships of dependence with the federal government and has seriously disrupted our sovereign rights to cultural integrity, which has ultimately also intervened in an established land ethic throughout the Americas.

A Native feminist land ethic challenges any reliance upon the federal government in the past and present in order to orient our communities to a liberatory future. In the last verse of “Solarize” SeasunZ raps, “we are the climate / let’s get together and change the weather, man / point to the future / just like the weatherman.” Here, the invocation of the future underscores the political stance these artists take, which seems to embody a politics of possibility. The manifold possibilities include a developed and implemented land ethic that may very well right some past wrongs and anticipate a promising future—in short, the song addresses what Native feminist scholar Winona La Duke has called the “unhealed wounds of federal policy” (2005, p. 51). The ultimate sign of this promising future in the video is symbolized when a young girl in the video plants a small green plant amongst the rubble of Mare Island Naval Shipyard. The community is there to support her efforts of placing life in an abandoned/dead space (see Figure 1.3 and Figure 1.4). Therefore, while the chorus ponders how we ended up in a space where land integrity has been systematically destroyed, the ending verse of the song leaves the listener hopeful for a differentiated future – hopeful, like the earth.



Figure 1.3: “Solarize” Video Screenshot. Small plant placed in the ground at Mare Island Naval Shipyard (2013).



Figure 1.4: “Solarize” Video Screenshot. Community celebrates at Mare Island Naval Shipyard (2013).

## Native feminist land ethics challenge Native non-feminist land ethics

In a recent article titled “Under Native American Skies” (2009), Walter Echo-Hawk, Jr. offers some insight into the necessity of a developed land ethic. He argues that a land ethic is “a key ingredient to social change, for without a land ethic, the American people cannot fully mature from a nation of immigrants and settlers recovering from a rapacious frontier history of Manifest Destiny and stride toward a more just culture that has adapted to the land...” (p. 58). Nonetheless, Echo-Hawk’s argument, like former arguments in Native Studies, relies too heavily on the federal government to implement such a ‘program.’ For example, he also suggests that not only should the federal government be charged with complying with land laws but he also says, “federal land agencies are charged with a higher degree of knowledge about the nature of the land and its cultural significance to the American public.” Moreover, he continues by asserting: “it is incumbent upon them [federal land agencies] to help lead our nation toward a land ethic for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 62). However, this approach ignores the ways that the project of white supremacist conquest of Native peoples and their lands has been carried out by the federal government and enforced by these same agencies. Why, then, should we turn to this very apparatus of domination for land sovereignty and for establishing a new land ethic? In addition, it is evident that the real acts of cultural genocide historically committed by the federal government would prohibit them from having a “higher degree of knowledge” (p. 62) about the land and its cultural specificities. In fact, as Harp asserts in the aforementioned “Solarize” lyrics, the government always had “blood rolled up inside the deeds.” In effect, asking federal land agencies to lead the way on land ethics is like asking communities of color who experience police brutality to continue to only rely on the police for protection in their neighborhoods—neither is an apparatus of true “protection.”

A Native feminist land ethic, therefore, immediately asserts an ethic that emerges organically, locally, and is one that consciously operates against the history, politics, and logics of settler colonialism in the United States. As a result, the “Solarize” video challenges, in the same Native feminist vein, a reliance on the federal government by actually critiquing U.S. policy and practices by staging its video and singing on a former military base. This is a very powerful and intentional artistic choice. Otherwise, why shoot the video in a land space that is evidently and directly constructed by the U.S. military? Not only is the Mare Island Naval Shipyard a former military location, the California State Parks Office of Historical Preservation has recorded it as the first naval base established on the Pacific Coast (1854). In other words, the historical layers of conquest, domination, and violence literally and symbolically represented in the geographical location of the song are a direct challenge by Harp, Fly50, and SeasunZ to our continued reliance on the federal government to alter the destructive course it maintains with regard to Native lands. This is an especially salient critique because Mare Island Naval Shipyard was also a site used by the U.S. Navy to launch warships against Native resistance efforts in the northwestern United States.

Distinct from Echo-Hawk’s position, Don Lee Fixico’s seminal text *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources*

(2011), argues against relying on the federal government for determining land ethics and good stewardship practices, especially because of the connections between the deterioration of land as a product of capitalist logics. Fixico writes: “American capitalism, deriving from a tradition of Eurocentrism, has continued through the twentieth century to exploit tribal nations for their natural resources, thus forcing Indian leadership to adopt modern corporate strategies to ensure the survival of their nations and people” (p. x). Furthermore, he argues that through white supremacist ideology and practices, both U.S. policy and its courts have maintained the dominating goals of the settler state to exploit Native lands and people.

In Fixico’s last chapter he narrates the policy implementations of the Clinton administration as examples of a discourse of “progress” and liberalism that seems to assert Indian rights. Fixico points to the 1999 Indian Water Rights Settlement Law as an example that preserved on-reservation water rights for the Rocky Boy’s Reservation in Montana, and points to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) in July of 2000 that compensated over 22,000 miners for uranium health damages (mostly diseases and birth defects) as positive acts on the part of the government. Yet, while these might be victorious moments of policy-making, it is important to note that the majority of U.S. policy, even when it has looked promising on the surface, has often been used to manipulate Native people into further land loss, or has at best only been symbolic in its assertion of Native rights. Therefore, Fixico adeptly shows that with the capitalist exploitation of Native people and their lands, there remains a persistent reliance on the fiduciary relationship with the federal government that is integral to such exploitation in the first place.

These very relationships are critiqued in “Solarize” as Harp sings, “The Doctrine of Discovery / used in mundane policy / Seiz[ed] our claimed property.” Here, Harp shows that the Marshall Trilogy Laws in the nineteenth century were in fact laws put forward by the settler state against Native people and our lands. These same laws formulated the “doctrine of conquest” and the “doctrine of wardship.” In fact, in the second case of the trilogy, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* in 1830, Justice Marshall declared Native nations were to be dependent on the federal government, like “a ward to its guardian” (Kidwell & Velie, 2005, p. 64). Thus, Harp even points to the longer history of legally sanctioning the seizure of Native land through “mundane policy.” Harp goes on to sing, “Sovereign nations lose their homes / Oil spills [while] Chevron grows.” These lines sum up the way in which these lands are taken and polluted by the establishment of the ward/guardian relationship. In other words, “Solarize” artistically and expressively underscores how the fiduciary relationship operates on a capitalist/neocolonial logic that allows for symbolic justice but no real change in terms of land ethics and relationships between Indian country and the U.S. government. “Solarize” also incites a critique of a settler state that feels it can absolve itself of wrongdoing with money and legislation that legitimizes its theft and pollution of the earth.

Therefore, “Solarize,” prompts us to challenge the relationship between Native people and federal government, and to challenge the logics of settler colonialism and capitalism as they continue to serve the aims of Native domination and genocide. I argue these are goals of Native

feminism, and thus, are well suited to a Native feminist analytic. Moreover, as the artists in the video take on the work of literally replanting new life in the midst of the Mare Island military base, they demonstrate how Native hip-hop can disrupt narratives of an ethic that relies on a destructive settler state. The message in the video is clear: it is not promising, nor productive, to trust the U.S. government to uphold treaties or enact protecting legislation when they continue to be a prominent neocolonial force of exploitation in Indian country.

So, what the “Solarize” video and other conscious cultural productions do is practice, popularize, and facilitate the dissemination of subaltern ideologies and ethics that can challenge settler colonialist understandings of land and people as expendable commodities. To these points the song and video “Solarize” puts into praxis a Native feminist land ethic—one that is led by the people, for the people, and critiques the federal government’s role in the displacement of Native people. That said, by no means am I suggesting an evacuation of demands for justice made by Native people on the federal government. I am, however, suggesting that *solely* relying on the federal government or federal land agencies for a land ethic has not worked and does not seem to be promising for the radical change we need in order to dismantle the settler state and its logics regarding the land.

### **“Solarize” and productive theoretical promiscuity**

*“Don’t forget your roots, the final step of genocide is in your mind / Your Indigenous truth is alive / not only within your DNA /but within your rhymes / whatever your rhymes may be /we’re ALL blessed with gifts and talents to find balance, you see?”—Tolteka, Interview with Author (2011)*

As noted above, my second major point about this song is that it also provides an example for us to concretize Simpson and Smith’s (2014) idea of “theoretical promiscuity.” This idea suggests that Native Studies has much to gain by theorizing and molding our discipline across multiple boundaries. This means Native Studies is stronger and, dare I say, smarter when theorized in collaboration with, rather than against, Black Studies, Latino/Chicano Studies, and Hip-Hop Studies just to name a few. This is a kind of productive intellectual and cultural promiscuity because it refuses to hold Native Studies and our scholars in isolation. For example, when looking at Native hip-hop I necessarily must dialogue across Native Studies, Black Studies, and Cultural Studies, at the very least. This is not to say that Native hip-hop is not unique or that it does not present a distinct set of social conditions that implicate the actions of the white supremacist settler state, because it does. It is to say, however, that Black Studies and Hip-Hop Studies has also theorized particularized histories and the present conditions of colonization and considering these with, rather than against, Native scholarship leads us to multiple possibilities for enacting present and future change for everyone, not just for Native communities. And, this point is thoughtfully illustrated by the creativity and collaboration of the different artists in “Solarize” as they collectively represent blackness and Indigeneity. Furthermore, theorizing across disciplines and across racial or ethnic groups is necessary because as Andrea Smith has



contended, the logics of white supremacy are not singular (p. 67-68). Thus, in order to combat the plurality of white supremacy it is imperative to keep the distinctions of settler colonialism and white supremacy against various communities in tact while simultaneously attempting to organize together.

Again, to illustrate, in the “Solarize” video we specifically see Native and Black artists collaborating to symbolically assert a new feminist land ethic—one that is structured symbolically around Desirae Harp’s introductory proclamations about her relationship to Mother Earth, her own mother, and the little girl who represents the future of our world. Nonetheless, we also see particular gender lines blurred, especially for hip-hop, since it remains a genre still largely dominated by male artists and producers. Desirae Harp certainly plays a central role in the song and the strong relationship that is portrayed between her and her mother posits a generational conviction to the development of a land ethic as well as a challenge to traditionally dominant male-centered focal points in hip-hop videos. These points are significant because the song is then less about identity politics and more about asserting a radical stewardship *with* not *over* the land, that is to be carried out generation after generation. I should be clear that I do not think the song then eradicates racial difference because this would be counterproductive. Instead, it seems to celebrate difference and cultural tradition while the artists simultaneously level critiques against the U.S. government and the system of capitalism that their own communities have been subject to both historically and in our present moment. Specifically, the kind of “theoretical promiscuity” I posit here with this song/video is one that necessarily sees Native sovereignty and Black sovereignty as fundamentally linked. As Nikhil Singh (2012) argues, “If U.S. settler sovereignty begins and ends with Indians, as [Lisa] Ford suggests, it comes to linger in complex ways on blacks and blackness” (p. 294). Singh goes on to say that the frontier mentality suggested that Indigeneity was eliminated, but blackness was reproduced under settler abuse as a “permanent threat, one that required investing every white person with the sovereign right to kill” (p. 294). Therefore, the history of settlers’ sovereignty over and against Native and Black self-determination is distinct, however, the continued effects of these colonizing practices persist to marginalize and isolate Native and Black communities to this day. So, it is significant that Harp, Fly50, and SeasonZ come together to artistically theorize an environmental ethic for the twenty-first century.

As this song also works to build alliances across Native and Black communities, it is perhaps important to note the issue of authenticity here. In Hip-Hop Studies the “authenticity debates” are large and complex. These debates primarily hinge upon who can rep’ and rap—authentically. In Native Studies, while we do not use the language of the “authenticity debates,” we certainly interrogate this terrain through identity. In bringing Native Studies and Hip-Hop Studies together I see the term authenticity taking on new forms, and perhaps even offering new interpretations of the debates in each field. Most significant to the point of developing Native feminist land ethics is the promiscuity of putting Native Studies and Hip-Hop Studies in conversation, through which there might be much to gain. In a foundational text taught in many

Hip-Hop Studies classes, *That's The Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, Mark Anthony Neal (2012) discusses what I might call the *instability of authenticity*. He argues:

What made hip-hop authentic was its process—a good ole American DIY ethic, grounded in the “make-a-way-out-of-no-way” ethos that has been the fuel for Black American progress for more than two centuries and perfectly pitched for those of the post-civil rights generation who are stuck on the “not-ready-for-integration” subway. The process that is hip-hop is not proprietary to the Bronx, New York City, the East Coast, or the United States and the Caribbean for that matter, which is why in every place in the world where hip-hop is relevant there’s an accompanying narrative about authentic beginnings in that part of the world. The point is that hip-hop has never been as “real” as we’ve been led to believe. (p. 69)

In this way Neal posits the idea that authenticity is a social fabrication used to control who belongs and who does not belong. Similarly, many prescriptions have been placed on Native people as to who can authentically claim Indigeneity and who cannot. These constructions are largely formed by a settler state that has fashioned rigid parameters around Indigenous authenticity. The settler state’s formation has at once imposed that Indigeneity is tied to the land, while they have expropriated those lands to deny our authenticity. By placing these two sets of authenticity debates in conversation, and allowing Native hip-hop artists to sonically and lyrically speak to these issues, the dichotomous lines of authenticity that are often controlled by the settler state are blurred.

Moreover, in order to connect “theoretical promiscuity” more closely to my discussion on land ethics and to the “Solarize” song/video I’d like to momentarily return to Don Lee Fixico’s text, *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century*. While I offered some critiques of Fixico’s reliance on the federal government to implement a land ethic through policy, and while he also seems to suggest the only necessary relationships to be built are those between Native people and non-Native elected officials, or mostly whites, he offers a promising overarching argument at the end of the book. He contends Indians alone cannot solve the problems we face in Indian country today. Here, I agree that we cannot implement a large-scale land ethic on our own, however, I think we can begin to make significant strides in this direction, as “Solarize” does, by learning from and with Black communities.

“Solarize” engages in this work by artistically collaborating across racial and ethnic communities, across generations, and across gender lines. In the song we hear all three artists level critiques of the misuse of land when they talk about global warming and settler state legislation. For example, Fly 50 raps, “we walked ourselves right into the arms of the enemy / humans want to clean up but do it timidly.” In these lyrics, Fly 50 expresses a sense of urgency as it relates to the land. In part the urgency comes from his call for not only Black and Native people to enter into the work of caring for the land without acting “timidly,” but for white communities to engage in this work, too. There also seems to be a sense of immediacy when he invokes the possible loss of our natural world when he raps, “what happens when the last tree

falls.” The thematic structure of this verse and other verses in the song suggest that if we are to embark upon a hopeful and radical future, all forms of life must be afforded sovereignty. This means people are not to use the land and natural world for capitalistic exploit, but are to invest in the life of the land—namely, be solarized.

## The futurity of Native hip-hop

*“Infinite wisdom, plus game equals fame.” –Reddnation, “Fabulous”*

A recent radical anthology, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (2011), attempts to wrestle with the question of the power of the arts to implement change. At the end of the anthology the editors invoke the arts as an avenue to perform the work of decoloniality. They note how the Métis resistance leader Louis Riel said, “My people will sleep for one hundred years; when they awake it will be the artists who give them their spirit back” (p. 220). Furthermore, the anthology asserts, “artists are the visionaries leading us to a bright future, to mourning the past in productive ways, and to sensuously stunning us in the present” (p. 220). I would add that artists can also provide a critical analytic, visually or sonically, that can enliven everyday people with a passion to work for social justice. This is no small task and, it often requires risk, but only through such movement can we engage in the work of decolonization of our lands, bodies, and psyches; and, conscious Native hip-hop artists perform this kind of critical creativity as they point toward sovereign futures while keeping a strong critique of settler colonialism and genocide in tact.

In fact, these artists are a reminder to the settler state that colonization was not ultimately successful. As Amsterdam has asserted, “When confronting the symptoms of settler colonialism—racism, rupture, police brutality, and hate—artists demonstrate that the materiality of hip-hop is a way of moving past the necessity of survival to a fuller, thriving political and cultural life and living, in spite of structural violence, upon the insistence that one is already free” (2013, p. 54). Therefore, while Native hip-hop in general, and the “Solarize” song in particular, might point us towards a promising form of futurity, it simultaneously enacts a present mode of sovereignty—cultural sovereignty. This work is absolutely necessary because cultural sovereignty is a key component of disrupting cultural genocide and I contend it is a central axis to developing a Native feminist land ethic. Native hip-hop artists are asserting that the land is not meant to be property, Native peoples can communicate a different way for everyone to live with the land, and our *actions* as to how we relate to the land significantly matter. These artistic productions then move us toward a better present and promising future. Again, to quote Desirae Harp: “my heart is in the water / my heart is in Mother Earth / my heart is in the strong winds / my heart is in all my relations.” These lyrics underscore both of my points for this article. Namely, through asserting a Native feminist land ethic that employs a productive promiscuity we can listen to our communities and even to the land to engage in radical relations throughout.

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