

**Speaking for the People: Native Writing and the Question of Political Form.** By Mark Rifkin. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. 320 pages. \$104.95 cloth; \$27.95 paper and electronic.

**Fictions of Land and Flesh, Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation.** By Mark Rifkin. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. 336 pages. \$104.95 cloth; \$27.95 paper and electronic.

Since Oxford University Press published *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* in 2009, University of North Carolina, Greensboro professor Mark Rifkin has written six more books, including his twice-award-winning *When Did Indians Become Straight?* (2012), and his most recent works, *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*, and *Speaking for the People: Native Writing and the Question of Political Form*. Not only is this torrent of scholarly production jaw-droppingly, and eye-poppingly, impressive (seven books in twelve years!), but Rifkin also plainly, unequivocally, has established himself as a perspicacious reader of culture and society at the crossroads of queer, Indigenous, Black, postcolonial, and American studies—as well as, dare I suggest, history and political theory. And he has done so on wide-ranging subjects—from temporality and spatiality and spacetime, to everyday colonialism, kinship, self-determination, and political form. Read together, Rifkin's *Fictions of Land and Flesh* and *Speaking for the People* not only pack a powerful punch, but also provoke deep reflection, introspection, admiration, and hope.

They appear to be very different works at first glance. *Speaking for the People* reads the related questions of, and dangers found in, recognition and political form in nineteenth-century Native nonfiction writing intended to reach settler publics. *Fictions of Land and Flesh* explores how Black and Indigenous studies might engage across their various histories and struggles in the shared space of speculative nonfiction, with a critical eye toward appreciating both the possibilities and dangers that follow from conflating the soul-sucking, despair-inducing pressures that distinguish those histories and struggles on the ground. Rifkin will not tolerate demoralizing despair as either inevitable or inescapable, as already demonstrated in each of his first five books. Both of these works evidence yet again his interrelated concerns—agency, humanity, kindness, morality, and justice—that join all seven books into conversation with one another.

*Speaking for the People* just might be Rifkin's most impressive work so far. Building on the earlier critical work of scholars ranging from Lisa Brooks and Drew Lopenzina to Robert Warrior, he humanizes William Apess through a fascinating lens that seeks understanding of Indigenous articulations of peoplehood on the ground in conversations with the surrounding settler societies and federal, state, and local

governments. Crediting his student Jason Cooke's 2015 dissertation "Indian Fields: Historicizing Native Space and Sovereignty in the Era of Removal" for his taking up this project on "representativity in nineteenth-century Native writing," Rifkin leverages historical distance to propose a "politics of reading" (vii; 28). As with Apress in 1830s Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, the author reads Elias Boudinot, Sarah Winnemucca, and Zitkala-Ša in their varied historical and geopolitical contextual specificity, all while generating powerful, thought-provoking, and most importantly, nuanced, versions of collective identity that speak to settler publics, and, in his words, "illustrate the variety of ways of envisioning and enacting peoplehood in the context of continuing (and intensifying) settler occupation" (29).

*Fictions of Land and Flesh* is delightfully provocative. Readers might consider starting with *Speaking for the People* first, especially the twelve-page "Recognition, Redux" section (16–28), followed by the introduction and opening chapter, "On the Impasse," in *Fictions*. When read together, these pages may fall among the most intellectually stimulating and heartening theoretical work that seeks to create a vision for common ground joining contemporary Indigenous and Black studies in the United States—in a manner that lifts conversation in both without negating either. Powerful stuff. His selection of science fiction ranges among Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, futurist short stories from Drew Hayden Taylor and Mari Kurisato, Walter Mosely's *Futureland*, Daniel Wilson's *Robopocalypse*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Rider*, Andrea Hairston's *Mindscape*, Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's *Oracles*, and Stephen Graham Jones's powerfully titled *The Bird is Gone: A Monograph Manifesto*. These offer fertile ground for imagining possibilities in "Black-Indigenous relation from two nonidentical trajectories in order further to suggest ways political imaginaries can open onto and engage each other without becoming a single framework" (14).

Perhaps the single most impressive feature that distinguishes *Speaking for the People* and *Fictions of Land and Flesh* is found in Rifkin's engagement with his many interlocutors representing Indigenous, Black, and queer studies, and theirs with his. Coming into view from this back-and-forth dialogue across scholarly production is a contemporary academic network that promises to continue delivering hope through the intellectual labor being created on the ground level inside the academic industrial complex, well into the future. Of course, where this happens reveals the "dark side" of these things as well. The violences and valiances of everyday misogyny, queer and transphobias, settler colonialism, and racism are not going away any time soon.

In closing, I suggest that Rifkin's impressively generative body of writing—a kind of "atom bomb" falling on settler colonialism and racism—should be read widely in higher education classrooms. Readers may recall Paul Fussell's "Thank God for the Atomic Bomb," an essay commissioned by the *New Republic* in 1981, in which the former WWII infantry platoon commander, who suffered near life-ending combat injuries as he helplessly watched the life drain out of his platoon sergeant, comes to understand the importance of what he termed the "sheer vulgar experience" in influencing, if not outright determining, a person's subsequent views "when coming face to face with an enemy who designs your death." There is an understandable reluctance among those of us in higher education communities to address the horrors

and traumas of combat, for warfighters and noncombatants alike, perhaps because too many of us have not faced an enemy who wishes us dead. Far too often the human beings who face the brunt of historical and continuing settler colonialism and racism—and their intellectual leaders and foot soldiers alike—largely remain outside the classroom, which renders the professoriate complicit in making, let alone failing to challenge, our mostly socially and economically privileged students to confront the morally bankrupt world we all inhabit unequally. We must do better. And with his two most recent books, Rifkin and his interlocutors offer us ways to imagine something else, by embracing the complexities and nuances in our varied histories and different motivations for wanting a better world, and finding ways to work across our many divides, without ignoring the reprehensible violences and injustices that landed us differently and unequally in this shared place.

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