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The Politics of Kinship: Race, Family, Governance. By Mark Rifkin. Durham: Duke University Press, 2024. 400 pages. \$114.95 hardcover; \$30.95 paper; \$17.02 e-book.

Mark Rifkin's scholarship draws on queer, feminist, political, and critical race theory to show how Indigenous alternative social and political formations can illuminate and challenge the assumptions that structure colonial governance. In his latest contribution to this project, *The Politics of Kinship*, Rifkin examines how liberal regimes mobilize narratives of kinship, family, privacy, and criminality to establish state authority and naturalize the racial distinctions that sustain settler colonialism. His monograph offers an important framework to understand the connection between kinship, relationality, and governance, even if its broader theoretical claims at times outpace the selective historical readings marshaled to support them.

Rifkin asks readers to rethink how we analyze governance and what counts as the political. Across four expansive chapters and a coda, he interrogates liberal categories that often appear natural (marriage, privacy, family, and criminality) to argue that they work as technologies of settler governance. Through close readings of court decisions, federal policy, bureaucratic implementations, and liberal theorists of family and governance such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Daniel Moynihan, he contends that the settler colonial state seeks to suppress Indigenous and Black political traditions because their relational forms of governance reveal alternative ways of organizing collective life and authority. Central to this project is the liberal distinction between public and private spheres, which defines the individuals and communities qualified to be legitimate political subjects in the eyes of the state.

Rifkin's central conceptual intervention is his insistence that kinship itself is political. Rather than treating family and relatedness as prepolitical domains, he argues they are central sites through which liberal states organize sovereignty and governance. They are also sites through which communities can defy state control and imagine alternative political worlds. Drawing on Native feminist scholarship, Rifkin argues that attending to Indigenous forms of relational, territorialized sovereignties reveals that political theory cannot be reduced to state institutions. Rather, Indigenous forms of relationality in and across territories have long organized collective life, authority, and governance—forms of political life that liberalism obscured by presenting “family” and “kinship” as private and prepolitical.

The book's interdisciplinary synthesis is one of its most significant strengths. Rifkin moves among federal Indian law, political theory, Native studies, Black studies, queer theory, and Native feminist scholarship to build a compelling argument, placing these intellectual traditions in meaningful dialogue to illuminate the limits of settler colonial liberalism. His integrations of Black critical theory, racial capitalism, and Native feminist scholarship into his argument is particularly impressive. The interdisciplinary

conversations Rifkin builds enable him to challenge assumptions about political life and offer scholars across all these fields an important shared vocabulary to reconsider the relationship between governance, relationality, activism, and the liberal state. Rather than importing theory into Native studies, Rifkin places intellectual traditions in genuine conversation to generate a conceptual framework greater than the sum of its parts.

Rifkin's close readings of federal law and policy are also compelling and do important work to reveal how supposedly neutral legal categories labor to contain Indigenous sovereignty and Black life within the confines of liberal governance. His analysis encourages legal scholars and historians to reconsider familiar cases not only as questions of jurisdiction or sovereignty, but as contests over the political organization of kinship, family, and collective life. Even readers who ultimately disagree with some of Rifkin's conclusions will find his conceptual framework intellectually provocative and difficult to dismiss. At its best, Rifkin's monograph demonstrates the value of reading law, political theory, and Indigenous theory together and offers a framework that scholars will continue to debate and build upon regardless of whether they accept every aspect of his argument.

The same theoretical ambition that makes *The Politics of Kinship* such an important contribution also exposes its principal weakness: the historical evidence marshaled to support his conceptual claims does not always sustain the breadth of his conclusions. For example, Rifkin's analysis of Lewis Henry Morgan's work on kinship as emblematic of the "enfamlyment" that naturalizes liberal governance leaves two complications underdeveloped: first, that the liberal distinction between public and private significantly predates Morgan; and second, that later anthropological understandings of kinship substantially revised Morgan's formulations in ways that might have further supported Rifkin's analysis.

In a similar manner, Rifkin's readings of US Supreme Court cases at times rely too much on their representativeness even as he ignores their full sociolegal frame. I repeatedly wondered if a relatively small number of decisions could bear the interpretive weight placed on them by his claims, and why he decided not to scrutinize their repercussions. Rifkin's reading of *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* (1978), for example, does not follow up with an examination of *Duro v. Reina* (1990), the "Duro fix," or *United States v. Lara* (2004). Doing so would not undermine his thesis about US racialization of Indigenous sovereignty, but it would complicate it by recognizing that the workings of the liberal state are more contingent and contested than his reading might imply.

Finally, Rifkin's evidence relies primarily on top-down sources—judicial opinions, federal policy, bureaucratic records, and published theory—rather than grassroots action or community-engaged records. His discussion of the Indian Child Welfare Act, for example, focuses on the text of the statute rather than the congressional hearings, coalition building, or legislative negotiations through which Indigenous activists and tribal leaders worked to embed Indigenous political values into the legislation. As a result, Indigenous political thought appears primarily through academics rather than through the community leaders and organizers whose activism has often generated the most consequential and embodied challenges to the liberal nation-state.

Regardless of these questions, this monograph joins a growing body of scholarship that interrogates how settler states deploy liberalism to maintain colonial authority. I could imagine a productive unit in a graduate seminar that reads *The Politics of Kinship* alongside Jodi Byrd's *Transit of Empire*, Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive*. These works all expose the mechanisms that naturalize settler power, but Rifkin's distinctive contribution is to identify kinship and relationality as a central terrain through which liberal governance works to discipline sovereignty, racialization, and political life.

The Politics of Kinship constitutes an important intervention in Indigenous political theory and poses questions that scholars should not easily ignore. Historians, Indigenous studies scholars, political theorists, legal scholars, and readers interested in settler colonialism or liberal governance will find much to engage in and debate in this work.

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