

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century. By Douglas K. Miller.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/23c6635s>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 43(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Tamir, Orit

Publication Date

2019-09-01

DOI

10.17953/aicrj.43.4.reviews

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

and interrupt the ongoing legacies of settlement” (226). As Indigenous studies scholars look to the past to help imagine routes to decolonization, Barber’s illumination of the intertwined lives of Flora Thompson and Martha McKeown makes a valuable contribution.

Jeffrey Ostler
University of Oregon

Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century. By Douglas K. Miller. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 257 pages. \$90.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper; \$22.99 electronic.

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, the Indian policy of the US government was “termination.” Its aim was to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society, do away with tribal identity, and thereby solve what the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) called the “Indian problem.” To that end, in 1952 the federal government’s Urban Relocation Program encouraged Native Americans to relocate from their rural reservations to cities such as Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and Seattle. In 1953, intending to assimilate individual Native Americans into mainstream American society, as opposed to one ethnic group, the US Congress passed an official termination policy that eliminated most government support for Indian tribes and ended the protected trust status of all Indian-owned lands.

In response to the termination policy, the BIA developed a voluntary urban relocation program that promised relocatees assistance finding housing and employment. Approximately 100,000 Native Americans relocated during the program’s twenty-five years, who, in research on the program and Native American urbanization, are commonly characterized as hapless victims. The pitfalls of urban relocation—high unemployment, low-end jobs, racial discrimination, homesickness, and social alienation—have been well documented in works by scholars including Donald Fixico, Thomas Clarkin, and Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson. Extending beyond the well-documented failures of the voluntary relocation program, *Indians on the Move* instead explores the transformative aspects and resourcefulness of “the urban Indian experience” in the broader context of Native Americans’ migration during the twentieth century. Douglas K. Miller aims at addressing the broader historical context of Native American migration and “survivance” and highlights Native Americans’ ingenuity, mobility, and determination to take charge of their own urbanization and their own destiny (4).

Native American migration to urban centers did not start with the BIA initiative. The early decades of the twentieth century abound with examples of Native Americans who embraced mobility and migrated to urban centers on their own volition as they responded to external pressures of domestic colonialism as well as internal drives to provide for their families, excel and succeed. Miller highlights, for example, Mohawks living in Brooklyn who went back and forth between New York City and their reservations in Canada and the United States in search of jobs. In the process, the Mohawks

made a name for themselves in the skyscraper construction industry (37–39). Other Native Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century also migrated to and between cities in efforts to provide for their families. While the migration of Native Americans to urban centers came at a cost for Indian reservations, their presence in cities also contributed to Native Americans' increased understanding of mainstream American social, political, and economic institutions. Decades before the BIA developed its voluntary urban relocation program this increased familiarity ultimately helped Native Americans to exercise self-determination and provided them with decolonization opportunities in the years leading up to World War II.

During the war, many Native Americans joined the armed forces and migrated to urban war production centers to serve the United States and their tribes in the war efforts. Their choice to migrate to cities during the war years played a considerable role in shaping both their home communities and federal visions for post-war Native American policy. Native American experience during the war years resulted in what the New Deal's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, called "the great exodus of Indians" from reservations (45). However, during the war not all Native people were new migrants to urban centers. Many lived in cities and stayed to exploit wartime job opportunities, such as the Mohawks of Brooklyn, for example, steelworkers who added battleship construction to building skyscrapers. While Native Americans supported the United States war effort, well into the postwar years they continued to experience socioeconomic exclusion in urban centers.

Postwar, Native American organic migration to urban centers continued alongside the BIA's urban relocation program and other federal Indian policies such as boarding-school education, land allotment, and termination. In many cases, Native Americans managed to shape federal programs and adapt them to their needs. In the aftermath of the war, for example, the Navajo and Hopi reservations experienced overpopulation and abject poverty. In efforts to alleviate these dire conditions, the BIA began to offer regional job services, including transportation, to Navajo and Hopi seeking relief from poverty so they could take advantage of jobs in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Denver. When President Truman and politicians promoted the Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act that Congress approved in 1950, it became an integral part of the termination policy and a step toward the BIA urban relocation program.

The Navajo tribal council supported the BIA voluntary urban relocation program, declaring that Navajos have migrated in search of work as far as recorded history goes. For their part, Navajos who migrated to cities often managed to negotiate their own working conditions, as is evident from the example Miller provides of Navajos working in Oregon. During the postwar years, thousands of Native Americans continued to leave their reservations for urban centers in search of work and upward socioeconomic mobility. As far as the Navajo tribal council was concerned, at least, the only real innovation was the BIA's assistance in voluntary relocation.

Shedding light on Native Americans' own initiatives and aspirations for their future, Miller's research uncovered handwritten letters that provide glimpses into how Native Americans maintained organic relations with their reservation communities and relatives, and explored and took advantage of their socioeconomic opportunities.

Indeed, as Miller underscores, migration to cities might have prepared those like Walter Echo-Hawk and Wilma Mankiller to be positive influences on Native American sovereignty and self-determination for years into the future. For countless Native Americans, unfortunately, especially under the BIA's program, urbanization proved to be challenging and detrimental as well. Despite the many successes of urban Native Americans, the difficulties of some confirmed expectations for Native Americans in urban centers. Often, however, the root cause of Native Americans' perceived failures was not an inability to cope with urbanization during the 1950s, but rather a gradual national trend away from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, coupled with many white Americans' move to the suburbs.

Miller succeeds in contextualizing Native American migration to urban centers in the twentieth century in a fresh and fascinating book written in an accessible style that will be of interest for anyone interested in Native American culture, history, and research. *Indians on the Move* shows that searches for employment and socioeconomic upward mobility were part of a larger story of Native American off-reservation migration. Time and again, the book clarifies that Native Americans' decisions to migrate were driven by their resolve to work, to succeed, and to take charge of their own destiny. Their fortitude turned into a source of empowerment. By expanding beyond the BIA's voluntary relocation program, and by exploring the broader development of Native American migration in the twentieth century, Miller challenges a common notion that Native Americans were passive victims of federal policies.

Orit Tamir

New Mexico Highlands University

Kayanerenkó:wa: The Great Law of Peace. By Kayanesenh Paul Williams. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018. 472 pages. \$74.95 cloth; \$38.95 paper; \$70.00 electronic.

In this exhaustive study of the Kayanerenkó:wa, the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace, Kayanesenh Paul Williams aims to demonstrate its validity as a living legal tradition—one worthy not only of critical study, but also viable in our own time as a means of establishing productive human relationships that reflect equality, reciprocity, and mindfulness of coming generations. No other study to date approaches the breadth or depth of Williams's research into the Kayanerenkó:wa—indeed, the book represents an updated synthesis of prior treatments of the Great Law by Lewis Henry Morgan, Horatio Hale, Arthur Caswell Parker, and J. N. B. Hewitt.

A practicing attorney in Canada, legal scholar, and member of the Onondaga Wolf Clan at the Six Nations of the Grand River community, Williams is uniquely positioned to offer this deeply researched, thoughtful treatment of the Kayanerenkó:wa to a wide readership of citizens and scholars of contemporary Haudenosaunee nations.

Eschewing a chronological narrative of the history of the Kayanerenkó:wa, Williams chooses instead to “[view] the past through the lens of a Haudenosaunee