

Auto/Qu



Introducing Rez Diff: Indigenous Perspectives

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'Rez Diff' is an act of reclamation.

'Rez' refers to reservations, areas of land 'reserved' for Indigenous peoples to live and (supposedly) to govern themselves, which have been negotiated with or designated by the federal government.¹ These federally designated lands are also sometimes called *rancherias* or *pueblos*. The spaces represent the negotiations and survivals of a tribe or tribes who have persisted through genocide, forced removal, or a number of other violent acts. For many Indigenous people, reservations bring conflicting feelings. If a reservation is located within traditional lands, it can be comforting to have a space where their culture, language, and collective identity is protected. Even when reservations are not located in traditional homelands, the ability to visit, commune, and govern with their own people is deeply meaningful. At the same time, however, that space is a product of the brutal, destructive effects of colonialism, imperialism, and racism—genocide, stolen land, broken treaties, cultural erasure and forced assimilation, and general discrimination, to name a few. For those of us who grew up on reservations, we hold all of these experiences all at once.

In the Americas in particular, white settlers have committed these atrocities in pursuit of advancing so-called Western civilization, a concept heavily influenced by Classical antiquity, built on colonialist idolization of ancient Greece and Rome as the roots of civilization.² White supremacists have long employed ancient sources as a basis for racist ideologies, establishing a Classical curriculum as the core of education, since the 17th century in North America and the Medieval period in Europe.³ Higher education, specifically, was not originally meant to encourage exploration, personal growth, or unique contributions to scholarship, and the world beyond. Rather, formal education was a form of exclusion, designed to reinforce hierarchy and affirm elite white male superiority. People of color, women, and socio-economically disadvantaged people were not welcome in higher education—except in cases which benefited the institution, such as in the example of Harvard's Indian College, which indoctrinated Indigenous men into Christianity so as to be of service to the academy and the church by assisting with religious publications.⁴ Many Native children faced similar forced assimilation through education, being sent to American Indian residential schools, where they were mistreated and required to abandon their Native cultures, languages, and values, replacing them with Western customs and ideologies.⁵ Land-grant universities and colleges are another way in which colonizers have weaponized educational institutions against Indigenous peoples, not only profiting from education

¹ 'What is a federal Indian reservation?' (US Department of the Interior): <https://www.bia.gov/faqs/what-federal-indian-reservation>; link accessed January 15, 2026.

² Blouin and Akrigg 2024, Umachandran and Ward 2024.

³ Richard 2009, Adler 2016, Dozier 2026.

⁴ 'History' (Harvard University Native American Program): <https://hunap.harvard.edu/history>; link accessed January 15, 2026; 'Final Project: The Indian College' (Inventing Harvard): https://legacy.sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/Inventing_Harvard/indian_college.html#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20that%20Harvard,Protestantism%20to%20local%20native%20groups; link accessed January 15, 2026.

⁵ Marquez 2024.

generally, but also depleting natural resources and erasing Indigenous histories—all for the sake of the academy, Classical education, and Western civilization.⁶

The rez functions not only as a space in which Indigenous peoples are kept together, but also as a way to keep Indigenous peoples out of spaces like the academy. This refers not only to physical space for being, but intellectual space for thinking, speaking, and creating. Indigenous peoples have long been excluded from these spaces, deemed incapable of contributing to knowledge. Ironically, at the same time, our cultures, languages, and practices served as rich ground for white researchers—cementing our status as the researched.⁷ Indigenous perspectives have not been welcomed in the scholarly world, especially in an area so intertwined with ‘civilization’ as Classical studies is. Equally, claims to who is or is not Indigenous in the past and present carry a weight that reverberates into our fields. We would like to acknowledge that through the silencing of Indigenous voices in academia, claims about Indigeneity and ties to land are distorted. In some cases, this means settler myths about who deserves to ‘own’ the Americas. More pressingly, it looks like denying the sovereignty and claims to land in both the past and present of Palestinian peoples to justify their genocide. It is thus necessary for Indigenous scholars to reclaim space in the academy for our perspectives to be recognized. This special journal issue does exactly that.

‘Rez Diff: Indigenous Perspectives is a collection of articles and artworks created by a diverse group of Indigenous scholars whose work examines colonialist, imperialist, and racist ideologies from the ancient Mediterranean to the modern Americas, exploring the relationship between the ancient Mediterranean and modern systems of oppression which have negatively affected Indigenous peoples. Together, the contributions cover a wide range of approaches to different types of evidence, ancient and modern, highlighting Indigenous perspectives in several important ways: recovering Indigenous experiences through ancient texts; recognizing the role of Classical studies and anthropology in land dispossession and destruction; questioning definitions of ‘indigeneity,’ ‘autochthony,’ and other terms; analyzing visual and material depictions of Indigenous peoples; exploring representations of Indigenous thought in philosophical texts; interrogating connections between Indigenous and ancient philosophy.

Each contributor’s work is informed by their personal experiences as Indigenous scholars, navigating systemic challenges in academia, marginalization, and generational trauma. The tribal affiliations and geographic homelands represented in this issue are far ranging, stretching from what is now known as Canada to the southwest of the US and Mexico. Our relationships to and with Indigeneity also vary: some of us grew up on a rez, some of us are ‘urban’ natives, and some of us are reconnecting and re-establishing our relationships to our peoples. We are proud to not merely recognize the inseparable nature of our identities from our scholarship but fully embrace this reality and celebrate the diverse and important contributions we have to offer.

While the journal issue is the first of its kind, it is not the first instance of Indigenous scholars gathering to present such work. Rather, it is the continuation of conversations which formally started as a conference panel at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies (SCS) in Chicago, entitled ‘Indigenous Perspectives: Ancient and Modern.’ The papers illuminated new ways of recognizing how Classical sources and ancient ideas

⁶ la paperson 2017, Padilla Peralta 2025.

⁷ Smith 2021.

have fueled modern perceptions of and attitudes towards Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The panel itself was the inaugural Mountaintop Coalition panel, advancing the Coalition's mission of professional development for people traditionally underrepresented in Classics and related fields, as well as fostering community. As editors of this issue, we would like to extend thanks to Mountaintop for providing the space, funding, and early seeds of this journal issue.

The process of planning, submitting, and participating in that panel brought to our attention the lack of devoted spaces for Indigenous scholars in Classics and related fields, and the need for a network to connect scholars engaging in work surrounding Classics and Indigeneity. The panel's success also made clear what can happen when such spaces open up: a larger community of Indigenous scholars in Classics, upending settler colonial traditions woven into the field itself, can shed new light on ancient material through Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing. Like the *rez*, the panel and this journal bring together Indigenous scholars, creating a space for cherishing our identities, honoring one another and our work, and finding a sense of empowerment and belonging.

It is impossible to completely capture, in any amount of words, our vision and hopes for this journal and the work and togetherness it may inspire. Indigeneity is not containable as something uniform and unchanging, and Indigenous people are not all the same. This reality conflicts with traditional academia, as scholarship tries to fit scholars and their work into separate, rigid boxes. *'Rez Diff: Indigenous Perspectives'* challenges that status quo. We hope that this introduction makes clear the importance of this work and serves as a call to continue being in community and collaborating with each other.

We now turn to a summary of the journal contents.

‘I am αυτοχθων’

We begin introducing the contents of this journal with a nod to our cover artist Evan Shannon's evocative statement ‘I am αυτοχθων.’ For Shannon (Dena'ina Athabaskan/Sugpiaq), this phrase does not invoke a mere equivocation of the term autochthony as Indigenous. Rather, Shannon posits that the term is better understood as sharing meaning with the phrase ‘time immemorial.’ In Indigenous spaces, policies, and traditions, ‘time immemorial’ serves as a marker and reminder for our long histories and relationships to the land. Shannon's note expresses this sentiment, as well as pushing back on colonial views of space and borders: our erasure from the land, and assumptions about the relevance of Indigenous thought on the Greco-Roman antiquity. Using the Greek word autochthon in place of Indigenous, First Nations, Native American, or other terms that mark our relationship to settler colonial empires, upends preconceptions of Indigeneity and its place within the discipline of Classics.

Shannon's art serves as key framing for the articles that follow. Each article presents an argument, not for mere inclusion of Indigenous methods into Classics, but instead for critical and pertinent interventions into the underlying suppositions of the field, and its entanglement with and justification of settler colonialism. The authors highlight ways in which Indigenous peoples, cultures, and philosophies have been relegated to the past, along with colonialism itself, as if they are not present today. In unique ways, each author approaches Classicism by embracing the truth that our identities, our personal experiences and perspectives, cannot and should not be separated from our identities as scholars.

Kendall Lovely's piece clearly demonstrates these themes. Oscillating between a scholarly article on the settler colonial foundations, and a curatorial commentary on modern Indigenous art, Lovely (Diné) reminds us of a central condition for Classics—its legacy and investment in land dispossession. This reminder comes through in Lovely's curatorial notes on Jessie Weahkee/Sleepyrocks' (Cochiti/Diné/Zuni/Chicana) digital artwork entitled 'WHAT IS SACRED?' An image of a Venus, re-imagined and re-clothed as a Diné figure, is foregrounded with crumbling pedestals and oil drills. For Lovely, the piece speaks to both the inherent sacred-ness of the land to Diné people and the encroaching environmental, spiritual, and cultural harms of colonialism. The question of what is sacred frames and haunts the analysis of Henry Morgan's first report for the AIA (Archaeological Institute of America). In deconstructing the report, Lovely traces the rigid racial hierarchies of *civitas* in the U.S. southwest and Morgan's dual romanticization of Indigenous peoples' 'ruined' landscapes and civilizations that occurred via his military exploits in the region. Lovely, through an Indigenous feminist practice, shows how Morgan, and his relationship to Classics and Anthropology, entangles questions of land dispossession and sovereignty into these disciplines.

Where Lovely traces land dispossession in the beginnings of the AIA, Ashton Rodgers (Mvskoke) shows how discussions of the 'dirty' c word, or colonialism, in Classics and Archeology, are divorced from the fabric and material realities of present-day forms of colonialism. Rodgers traces this apprehension in Classics and Archeology, beginning with an understanding of the 'simulacra' of the 'indian' in southern Italian archeology and intellectual history. From these static notions of the 'indian,' Rodgers offers an archive of scholars' (mis)use of the term 'indigenous' in ancient Mediterranean contexts. This archive makes visible the whiteness inherent in these discussions. The hidden racialized discussions that are inherent in making claims about Indigeneity also demonstrate how and when Indigenous people become re-inscribed into objects of study, rather than the fluid, autonomous, and sovereign peoples that they are.

Lovely and Rodgers' contributions ask what is sacred, and what is or was 'indigeneity.' Cassandra Casias (Chicana) maintains this line of questioning by asking who 'counts' as Indigenous. Through the conceptual framework of *mestizaje* ('mixture'), the article shows that what the term invokes about Indigeneity can be used to intervene in questions of identity in antiquity. Casias makes this intervention in Roman North Africa, where she applies *mestizaje* to uncover the multifaceted identities embedded within Augustine's *Africa*. This article not only engages in central questions about Indigeneity, and race making, but also extends the geographical borders that are represented in this issue. Casias' contribution serves as a testament to the breadth and depth that a concept like Indigeneity can have in understanding and/or problematizing material from the ancient world.

The final two articles, by Jennifer Komorowski (Oneida) and Ashley Lance (Wiyot/Yurok), offer a moment to consider the themes of this issue through philosophical and epistemic questions. The pun is too tempting not to make: if 'I am autochthon' is guiding the initial descriptions of these pieces, then the final two represent the premise that leads to the conclusion 'I think therefore.' The pun, in part, is most useful for thinking with Komorowski's piece which surveys Descartes, Plato, and Aristotle to show that, despite the fact that they are distinct in their philosophical approaches, they nevertheless coalesce in their abilities to offer frameworks for dehumanizing. The specific forms of dehumanization Komorowski focuses on center around our ability to feel as Indigenous peoples, echoing the quote from George Manuel and Michael Posluns' work, 'Does Indians have feelings?' Komorowski's approach is informed by personal experiences about her own and other

Indigenous peoples' ability to feel and process like a 'normal' person, contradicting Western philosophy which defines Indigenous peoples as unfeeling, uncivilized 'Others.'

Ashley Lance's piece offers a key follow up to Komorowski's question and (again) continues the Descartes pun, taking up a central question asked by Hamid Dabashi: 'Can we (non-Europeans) think?' This question is asked in earnest after a series of assumptions made by historians of philosophy which denounce and devalue the contributions of Indigenous people to the history of philosophy. Lance challenges these assumptions, demonstrating how Indigenous philosophy can be usefully taught in tandem with 'ancient' philosophy. The standard comparison of Indigenous philosophy with Greco-Roman philosophy is one that is based in seeing both belief systems and peoples as a function of the distant past. Lance recognizes the dangers of a strict 'temporal' understanding of the history of philosophy which creates boundaries and disconnects the history from the people and places who made it.

The series of questions these articles ask: what is sacred, what is colonization, what is Indigenous, who counts as Indigenous, can we feel, can we think? We end on a note of emphasizing how interconnected these questions and pieces are. While the function of an introduction like this is to give a sense of how the articles relate to each other, we understand that journal issues are often read in pieces rather than in full. We hope to have made an argument for taking the time to read this journal and these contributions together, as they add up to more than the sum of their parts. This issue demonstrates how crucial it is to celebrate diverse perspectives in academia, given the fruitful conversations which can arise from doing so. In accordance, we would like to end with a call for further dialogue. As has been emphasized, while this journal issue represents a huge moment for Indigenous peoples in Classics, this should be seen as only the first words in a lasting conversation on how Indigeneity, race, colonialism, and empire are embedded in discussions of the past.

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Acknowledgements

As special editors of this journal issue, we would like to acknowledge and thank the team at *Res Difficiles, The Journal*: Hannah, Joe, Ben, Elke, and Luke. Thank you for the care and time you put into reading each piece, and the guidance and support you gave us along the way. Thank you also to our peer reviewers who provided generative feedback to each contribution. Hannah and Joe, thank you for creating this journal and making this opportunity possible.

We would also like to give a huge thank you to our amazing contributors: Kendall, Ashton, Cassandra, Jennifer, and Evan. Thank you for bearing with us through all the emails and revisions. Your work is what makes this journal. You have brought our vision to life. We are so grateful to be in community with you.

Additionally, we thank the Mountaintop Coalition for supporting the 2024 SCS panel which led to this journal, 'Indigenous Perspectives: Ancient and Modern,' as well as all of the panelists: Cassandra Casias, Kendall Lovely, Caitlin Mostoway-Parker, and respondent Daniel Padilla Peralta.

Finally, a warm thank you to the person who introduced us to each other: Elizabeth Wueste. Both of us volunteered, in different years, at the American Excavations at Morgantina, and despite the fact we never worked with each other, Elizabeth made sure to introduce us. That introduction has sparked such a great friendship and collaboration—including this journal.

With endless gratitude,
wok-hlew,
Ashley and Tara

*Dedicated to Brit,
my furry companion,
who purred on my lap while I worked on this issue.
I will love and miss you forever.*

-Tara