

## ASECS: Indigenous Language Guidelines and Resources

**Overview:** As scholars of the eighteenth century, we know that colonial cultures have sought to erase African diasporic and Indigenous languages, ways of being, and knowledge traditions, which have produced racialized ideologies with weight and history. While academic organizations like ASECS are striving to cultivate antiracist methods and decolonial approaches to eighteenth-century studies, we know that the work is ongoing. We begin by acknowledging that Indigenous identities are diverse. Preferred terms may vary depending on the individual and nation and may change over time. No set of guidelines can fully account for diverse Native histories. And we recognize that approaching language guidelines *in* English reflects the continuing effects of colonialism.

With these acknowledgements, we are reminded by Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar [Linda Tuhiwai Smith](#) that supporting decolonial methods is “a critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination.” We believe that confronting the dire effects of colonial histories by offering language guidelines and resources is an imperative in line with Smith’s argument that decolonization is a process of “rewriting and rerighting our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (29-30).

Our approach to terminology is inspired by Opaskwayak Cree scholar [Gregory Younging’s](#) work on Indigenous style guides, and by efforts led by [P. Gabrielle Foreman](#) and other scholars in Black studies to create community recommendations on language. In what follows, we offer guidelines and resources—extended in a spirit of collegiality that we might come together with a shared conviction that words are powerful, and knowledge production is not neutral. We also anticipate that this will become a living, changing document—subject to revision, to the addition of further resources, and to reformulation for other contexts by organizations vital to ASECS, including journals.

**General Guidelines:** BIPOC, LGBT, and women writers have classified themselves differently over time or differently challenged terms imposed by coercive systems. We know that in many of the eighteenth-century archives we study, identitarian terms deployed terms that reduced women, people of color, and queer people as objects of study and ethnographic capture. At a granular level, we see these ideologies at work in the way nouns frequently stand in for marginalized people (e.g. “natives”). To counter these histories, we propose that identitarian terms like “Indigenous,” “Black,” “female,” and “queer” should work as an adjective modifying a noun as often as possible.

**Land Acknowledgements:** Often scholars begin their presentations by [acknowledging](#) where [they live](#) and have received institutional support, whether this means recognizing [Native homelands](#) or their nation’s imperial histories (we see the latter more often with our colleagues whose institutional homes are in Europe). While we know that land acknowledgements can be vital, we have also seen institutions weaponize or appropriate them in ways that are counter to Indigenous sovereignty.

As we come together as a community, we may wish to take up [Eugenia Zuroski’s](#) classroom exercise, which begins with a series of questions: “Where do you *know* from? How do you talk about your knowledge and how it comes to you?” She prompts us to think about knowledge in a capacious sense—not only what we have learned in formal educational settings, but also from embodied and place-based experiences. This practice also pushes us to confront how dominant knowledge systems may be predicated on ongoing forms of violence, including stolen land. Land acknowledgements should thus recognize that “where we know from” is just as vital as “what we know.”

**Citational Practices:** Citation is an ethical practice of recognizing all who have shaped our thinking—those whose intellectual labor we are indebted to, as [Sam Placensia](#) argues. Choctaw scholar [Megan Peiser](#) argues that conventional modes of citationality in eighteenth-century studies have often reproduced colonialist knowledge systems and failed to engage with Native studies—habits we should work collectively to challenge. We also wish to heed [Katherine McKittrick's](#) reminder that citations should not operate as a “quotable value,” but rather orient us to “other possibilities” for knowledge production, including citation “as learning, as counsel, as sharing.”

Scholars in Indigenous studies, then, urge us to cultivate citational practices by engaging deeply with Indigenous scholars and openly acknowledging their tribal-national affiliations. For settler scholars, ethical citation also begins with recognizing *their* relations to colonial power. As [Max Liboiron](#) remind us, “It is common to introduce Indigenous authors with their nation/affiliation, while settler and white scholars almost always remain unmarked [...] This unmarking is one act among many that re-centres settlers and whiteness as an unexceptional norm.” This “unexceptional norm” has been (and still is) unfortunately prevalent to methods and approaches in eighteenth-century studies.

**Global Indigenous Terminologies:** Some Indigenous activists contend that the term “Native American” has been imposed by white settlers and is both too geographically confined (i.e., referring to Native communities in the United States rather than the globe) and yet too abstract (the term does not recognize broad, rich cultural traditions and pluralities across different Indigenous nations—“the Native Americans” is non-specific). To that end, many U.S.-based scholars are moving away from using “Native Americans” in favor of “Indigenous peoples,” as well as thinking more inclusively about Native Alaskan, Inuit, and Kanaka Maoli communities. In addition, Native language guidelines in the settler nation of Canada recognize First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit communities. Native scholars in what are now the settler nations of New Zealand and Australia, as well as in other colonized territories, are having similar, necessary, and ongoing debates.

Below are resources drawn from universities, museums, and Native studies programs, which may be useful. However, we recognize they are specific to North American and Anglophone contexts: we hope to include materials from other geographies and languages as we continue to revise this text:

- Terminology guidelines and resources for the [settler nation](#) of the [United States](#).
- Terminology guidelines and resources for the [settler nation](#) of [Canada](#).
- Terminology guidelines and resources for the [settler nation](#) of Australia.

**Capitalize Terms:** In Native studies, scholars urge that identity terms should be capitalized, as Cherokee scholar [Daniel Heath Justice](#) argues that not doing so could be “an intentional act of political diminishment” (7). We offer this suggestion recognizing that while capitalization is the norm in Native studies, it may not be the consensus approach in other fields, such as Black studies. Scholars may wish to keep this in mind with accessibility copies, PowerPoints, or handouts.

**“Indian”:** In a North American context, “Indian” is the most common term in colonial archives and because of this, carries painful histories. Dakota scholar [Vine Deloria, Jr.](#) argues that in specific circumstances, “Indian” can make visible how Indigeneity became a racial category that subjected Native people to judicial and political intervention in settler states (i.e. in the Indian Removal Act) (25-6). The term can usefully demarcate Anglo-American mythmaking *about* Indigeneity (the trope of the “Vanishing Indian”) *from* Indigenous peoples’ own ways of naming themselves and telling the

histories of their communities. We recognize, then, that this term has devastating legal and political meaning, and should only be used very carefully (such as when quoting from a text).

**Settler Slurs:** Colonial languages often deploy slurs when referring to Indigenous peoples. In addition, terms that denigrate the lives and histories of Native women are deeply intertwined with settler archives and regimes of power. As they exist within categories of profound violence, terms like *squ\*w* or *r\*dsk\*n* should *never* be spoken in a conference setting, not even when quoting a text.

**Tribe vs. Nation:** Some scholars and activists are moving away from “tribe” and using “nation,” “tribal-national,” or “confederacy” because the latter terms may better represent historical and ongoing Indigenous practices of sovereignty—for instance, by invoking “the Cherokee Nation” rather than “the Cherokee tribe.” At the same time, terms like “nation” do not align interrelated, kinship-based communities with political and diplomatic practices rooted in consensus, reciprocity, and mutuality, and may reproduce Western political ideas premised on national borders and other practices of state-sanctioned violence. It may, nonetheless, be useful to shift towards vocabulary that makes visible Indigenous sovereignty, even while we recognize the limitations of English terms.

**Indigenous vs. Settler Names:** Both official designations and popular usage sometimes use settler terms for Indigenous nations, rather than their own designations and some of these names are based in adversarial languages (the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ have been called “Sioux,” for instance, which comes from an Anishinaabemowin term that means “snakes”). These naming conventions sometimes carry over into federally recognized names (i.e. Yankton Sioux). As a society, we may want to be clear on when it might be useful to make visible the complicated histories of tribal-national terms and when it might be more responsible to use an Indigenous nation’s historical and preferred name—and acknowledge that these conflicts are frequently rooted in eighteenth-century colonial archives.

**Terminologies for Settlers:** Scholars in Black studies have been urging us to take care in using terms that make visible the violences of enslavement—not “master” or “mistress,” but “enslaver,” for one—and scholars in Native American and Indigenous studies are having similar conversations. For eighteenth-century studies, terms like “discovery” and “discoverers,” among others, elide the historical and ongoing relations of care that Indigenous communities have for their homelands.

Daniel Heath Justice recommends “colonizer” and “settler” “to signify those peoples and populations not identified as Indigenous, primarily but not exclusively of European heritage, and often representing and furthering the policies, practices, and perspectives of the larger settler state” (14). He argues that if “‘Settler’ is a challenging word [...] it’s because settler colonialism is unpleasant” and “erasing those complexities just becomes another form of violence” (18).

**Black and Indigenous Relations:** Scholars in Indigenous and Black studies remind us to recognize that terms like “settler” or “colonizer” do not always describe the histories and lived experiences of people of African descent in the Americas. As Anishinaabe writer [Patty Krawec](#) argues, “Black people” who are the descendants of enslaved captives “are not settlers” (5). Krawec draws from African Canadian human rights lawyer [Anthony Morgan](#) and uses “displanted” to describe enslaved peoples’ coerced movements under transatlantic slavery. Krawec’s perspective echoes Cree-Métis scholar [Chelsea Vowel’s](#) guidelines that “the term settler does not, and can never, refer to the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped and sold into chattel slavery” (17). Chickasaw scholar [Jodi Byrd](#) similarly uses “arrivant” to “signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe” (xix).

We know that Black and Indigenous histories are intertwined in this historical period. Native writers like William Apess are of Indigenous and African American descent, while Cherokee Freedpeople, the descendants of enslaved captives in the Cherokee Nation, were long denied citizenship and recognition as Native relatives, as Cherokee scholar [Kathryn Walkiewicz](#) argues (18-19). Finally, Maya Ch'orti and Binnizá-Zapotec scholar [Jessica Hernandez](#) reminds us that African peoples are “Indigenous to the continent of Africa” and should thus be included in Indigenous scholarship (3).

Historical formations of slavery, immigration, and colonialism were complicated in the eighteenth century and continue to be so today. Present-day immigrants of color may be settlers in Canada and the United States, but contemporary patterns of migration, refugee flight, and displacement have been and continue to be shaped by extractive capitalism, imperialism, and climate change, whose configurations emerged or expanded in the period we study. Scholars in Indigenous and Black studies, then, urge us to recognize the differential violences of slavery and settler colonialism and resist reductive binaries in analyzing the histories and ongoing legacies of these systems.

### **Works Cited:**

- Byrd, Jodi. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Deloria, Jr., Vine. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. For. Leslie Marmon Silko and George E. Tinker. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Press, 2003.
- Hernandez, Jessica. *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2022.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2018.
- Krawec, Patty. *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2022.
- Liboiron, Max. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- McKittrick, Katherine. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Morgan, Anthony. “Black people in Canada are not settlers.” *Ricochet Media*. 12 March 2019.
- Peiser, Megan. “We Have Always Been Here: Indigenous Scholars in/and Eighteenth-Century Studies,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 33.2 (2021): 181-188.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Zed Books, 2012.
- Vowel, Chelsea. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*. Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2016.
- Walkiewicz, Kathryn. *Reading Territory: Indigenous and Black Freedom, Removal, and the Nineteenth-Century State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023.
- Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*. Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018.
- Zuroski, Eugenia. “Where do you know from?: An Exercise in Placing Ourselves Together in the Classroom.” *MAI Feminism*. 27 January 2020.

**Acknowledgements:** Those of us who have worked on this text—Willow White (Métis Nation of Alberta), Shelby Johnson and Katarina O’Brian (settler scholars)—extend our gratitude to the individuals and communities who have generously supported this work or offered feedback, including Catherine Nygren, Jeremy Chow, members of ASECS’s DEIA committee, the Race & Empire Caucus, and members of *ABO*’s editorial team.