

Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative. By Amy L. Brandzel. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

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Drawing from scholars of queer, critical legal, and race theory; post/de/colonial studies; and research on Indigenous and native nations, Amy L. Brandzel provides an extended attack on the concept of citizenship. The assault proceeds by way of a syllogism announced in the opening pages and that reappears elsewhere: liberal democratic citizenship equals a false promise of inclusivity; a false promise of inclusivity equals destruction of anti-intersectional politics and anticolonial politics; destruction of anti-intersectional and anticolonial politics equals the imperative to reject liberal democratic citizenship (3–4).

Those familiar with work by Lee Edelman, Audra Simpson, and Dean Spade, not to mention late twentieth-century interventions by Wendy Brown, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Lisa Duggan, will recognize Brandzel's arguments and the unresolved tensions within and among them. Those unfamiliar with this important archive of theories of race, sexuality, and the settler state will find a useful resource. In particular, Brandzel stages the challenge of undermining White colonizing nations' legitimacy for their violence and their exclusions based on kinship laws, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, advocating for the sovereignty of Indigenous nations and prerogatives for its members based on traditional genealogy, not the Foucauldian kind.

The book devotes a chapter each to the politics of hate speech law, same-sex marriage law, and the fight over the criteria for eligibility to elect trustees to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The guiding principle that runs through the book is that liberal democracy not only fails to emancipate people but effects a promise that is both false and also unjust. Brandzel points to examples of liberal democratic legislative and judicial discourse that suggest the state will protect sexual minorities and Indigenous or sovereign nations whose members are attacked, disrespected, oppressed, and feared by the very government, while this same government continues to hurt them and deny them protection and recognition.

In her chapter on anti-hate speech laws, Brandzel uses excerpts from court opinions and congressional debates to exemplify her targets, quoting at length, for instance, from a colloquy between then-Senator Jeff Sessions and a witness defending a bill defining homophobic violence as a hate crime. Sessions argues that if a man attacks his sister's gay exhusband for "tak[ing] up a homosexual lifestyle," he could be prosecuted for a hate crime, but he would not

be so prosecuted if the husband left his wife for another woman (64–65). Brandzel offers this line of questioning as evidence of officialdom’s general cluelessness about oppression and evidence of “comparative anti-intersectionality” (65), a jargony phrase that she offers instead of a reasoned refutation of Sessions’s query.

The chapter on same-sex marriage culls from numerous critiques. Here are three. First, it is a self-indulgent choice for entitled White people who are ignoring the plight of the “mass incarceration of people of color” and those who lack any civic status (91). Second, some same-sex marriage advocates selectively appropriate discourses of so-called Native peoples to “legitimate their place on stolen land.”¹ And third, the government’s recognition of same-sex marriage is a strategy of cooptation, a “better choice than leaving these sexual subjects in the underregulated space that lies between criminalization and legitimization through marriage,” implying a strategy that perhaps gives too much credit to folks like Sessions and not enough to Ruth Bader Ginsburg.²

The third chapter advancing the claim against citizenship focuses on a case that found its way to the Supreme Court, *Rice v. Cayetano* (2000). Brandzel reviews the opinion and lower court motions and orders in a lawsuit against the State of Hawaii brought by “Caucasian” “settler” Harold Rice, whose family lived in Hawaii before US annexation (*Rice* at 13). Rice invoked the Fifteenth Amendment to challenge his exclusion from voting for representatives to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, a lawsuit a District Court judge joined with one brought by Native Hawaiian Kakalian plaintiffs aggrieved by Hawaii’s eclipse of their sovereign authority. The Supreme Court ruled that Hawaii’s reliance on ancestry to define voter eligibility violated the Fifteenth Amendment. On Brandzel’s reading of the case and the majority opinions, the Court unjustly affirmed a US legal code superseding the sovereignty of Indigenous Hawaiians: “history is mobilized to confirm the colonialist enterprise of the U.S. nation-state by reproducing citizenship as a progressively inclusive and evolutionary paradigm” (103).

Brandzel’s conclusion calls for queer theory’s antifuturity analyses. “Queering the faiths in citizenship, law, and temporality creates a space in which decolonial, queer, feminist and critical race scholars and activists work toward imagining and restructuring accountability in order to see oppression, seek change, and envision justice in the present” (147). No further specifics are provided, nor is this ever reconciled with Brandzel’s embrace of sovereign na-

¹ Brandzel 92, quoting Scott Lauria Morgensen, “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modalities,” *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 123.

² Brandzel 94, quoting Katherine Franke, “The Domesticated Liberty of *Lawrence v. Texas*,” *Columbia Law Review* 104, no. 5 (2004): 1425–56.

tions whose integrity was disrupted, corrupted, and for the most part destroyed by European settlers. Brandzel's refusal of liberal democratic citizenship—something that has never actually existed—ignores quandaries of scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Edward Said, Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy, as well as work that explicitly and implicitly pursues the fraught politics of Spivak's strategic essentialism. Regardless of whether one embraces or rejects strategic essentialism's compromises, it is impossible to formulate a politics on behalf of indigeneous sovereign nations without engaging what it means to act on behalf of a subject position interpellated by others, be it one's contemporary enemies or narratives recreated by the group whose membership one has inherited by ties defined by kinship or actual genetics (135). Brandzel's arguments run on two parallel tracks, one committed to queer theory and another to full-blown nativist practices and claims oblivious to anarchist, pacifist, and queer—not just liberal—critiques of diachronic identities that depend on intuitions about nature, nativity, and nationalism.

Brandzel's work reiterates themes common to what might be called "contemporary oppression" or "injustice studies." Her main inference from these, to oppose citizenship, follows from this logically and, alas, repeats their familiar failure to engage tough questions raised by earlier generations of theorists and historians, some of whom Brandzel cites. First, if our group identities are not natural but exist through political or other kinship laws and practices, then why call some nations "native" and "Indigenous" but not others? If the answer is "whoever was there before someone else from a different intergenerational group," then does that mean that the unpopulated lands encountered by European conquistadors, explorers, and their descendants should exclude from membership those arriving later who are associated with other intergenerational groups? Is Brandzel, in the contemporary Southwest, willing to put herself under the rule of native descendants of White slave-owning filibusters, or Mexican ranchers, or Spanish conquistadors who staked out territory that was not previously settled? Much of the terrain where Europeans settled in the Americas was previously occupied—it was easier to take over established trade routes and cultivated fields than create them anew. But in absolute terms, massive amounts of land on this continent and elsewhere were staked by out by European settlers in areas that had never been seen by anyone: do these regions belong only to the countries, clans, or families of the descendants of those adventurers? Their churches? And if not, what distinguishes their conquest from that of the "Indigenous" nations of Hawaii and elsewhere in the Americas, who also did not spring out of that earth but arrived there at some point after they were born?

And yet if Brandzel embraces the queer attack on borders and the free movement and legal protections of migrants outside their countries of ori-

gins, then on what basis would Rice or anyone else be excluded from voting for representatives to determine the cultural disposition of their states of residence? Where is the argument—not “comparative anti-intersectional” name-calling but the argument—for despising the Nazis’ invocation of “blood and soil” and not the claims of an Indigenous Hawaiian nation? If Brandzel brings a queer appreciation of narratives behind the racist, capitalist ideological underpinnings of mass incarceration, and remains committed to the present, then on what basis is she celebrating any group’s intergenerational sovereignty over land and people? Brandzel cites scholars challenging naive views that sovereign native nations were utopian or without their own wars (119). So why develop an analysis that not only affirms their purity and rejects hybridity but provides political support based on putative bloodlines? None of these are easy questions, and I hope to read Brandzel’s thoughts on them in her subsequent contributions to this scholarship. |