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Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England.
By Jean M. O'Brien

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documents in light of how Iroquois (not Europeans) might have interpreted the diplomatic decisions, Parmenter offers a rich and vibrant historic overview of Iroquoia before 1701.

Some Algonquian scholars may feel that the author has downplayed the significance of Iroquoian losses during the Beaver Wars, particularly in the Ohio Valley, and others may fret that the author has ignored actual favoritism toward the French or English among Iroquoian leaders. Nevertheless, Parmenter has returned the Iroquois Confederacy to an important (if not preeminent) position in our understanding of the contest for control of the American interior during the seventeenth century.

In his recent study *The Elusive West*, Paul Mapp has documented how Euro-American knowledge about the “West” foundered when there was no single dominant power, lingua franca, or ceremonial rite that allowed for the transference of that knowledge from one culture to another. Parmenter’s examination of spatial mobility and the geographic awareness it produced in the context of the condolence ceremony shows what happened when this common cultural link was present: it brought new peoples into the Iroquoian sphere, enlarged their geographic knowledge, and limited French and English awareness of the *pays d’en haut*. The Iroquois controlled the geographic knowledge necessary to dominate the first American West, and they used that control to further their own ends.

Finally, the book’s epilogue represents a welcome trend in scholarly writing: contemporary application. Parmenter wants his work to have relevance in Indian country today. He hopes his work will help Iroquoian peoples in Canada and the United States fight governmental attempts “to disqualify many Iroquoian people and communities” from claiming “indigenous citizenship and nationhood” (279). How successful his efforts will be is unknown, but it is a worthy goal.

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Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England.
By Jean M. O’Brien. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 320 pages. \$75.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.

Near the Merrimack Valley town where I live, a sign proclaims that this area was once known as “Old Dunstable . . . the original town chartered by Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1673, which embraced parts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts.” Such signs are ubiquitous in New England. Anyone

traveling will inevitably come upon them and take in their pervasive message: in these places the makers of history were the “original” Anglo-American settlers of colonies such as Massachusetts Bay. They were the “first” founders of the places we now inhabit.

What the sign and most local histories do not reveal are the layers that the signs have “replaced.” In her book *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*, historian Jean O’Brien terms this act of replacing “firsting,” whereby non-Indians claimed to be “the first people who established cultures and institutions worthy of notice” (xxii). O’Brien’s book is a long-awaited study of the phenomenon of the “replacement narrative,” in which New Englanders composed historical narratives, erected signs and monuments, and engaged in pageantry that placed Indians firmly in prehistory and relegated their “descendants” to the fate of “vanishing.” For nearly two centuries these replacement narratives have encouraged us to believe that the “first” New England towns arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, built by settlers who naturally “replaced” the Indian people who lived lightly on the land during a vague, hazy time prior to modern history. While O’Brien is not the “first” to point out the ironies of posting signs of first settlement in previously planted indigenous towns like Wicasauke, she is among a growing group of scholars who are bringing the origin stories of the nation under incisive scholarly examination.

More than a decade of research took O’Brien to archives across New England and beyond, including the extensive collections of the American Antiquarian Society and the Newberry Library. She mined voluminous local nineteenth-century histories, commemorative pamphlets, and other texts of “memory-making.” The writing brought her to universities, conferences, and forums across the country, where she engaged in provocative conversations with fellow historians, indigenous studies scholars, and tribal members from New England. The resulting book catalogues the pervasiveness of “firsting” and builds a strong argument that New Englanders claimed a place as the first to settle the land by forging a replacement narrative. According to this narrative, the “ancient peoples” who hunted and wandered the land naturally disappeared in the wake of civilization, while the “settlers” built the first significant structures and the first modern nation, replacing the earlier peoples and ushering the land into modernity. The settlers “seized indigeneity” as “a birthright” by virtue of the labor of their “improvements” (57).

O’Brien shows that the town histories follow a typical script. The first chapter or preface usually includes a brief section on the town’s “pre-history,” with its Indian inhabitants blended in with the flora and fauna or the geological wonders created by the glaciers. This prefatory history then unfolds into an account of the “first settlement,” forged through the hard labor and leadership

of Anglo-American men, often named with pride, and legally founded on grants from the colonial courts (which often included those first settlers) and titles gained from local sachems, who authorized “the English presence in Indian homelands” (20, 53). Some accounts also acknowledge the clearing of title as a result of the infamous King Philip’s War, portrayed as a last-ditch attempt by primitive hunters to claim their hunting grounds before settlement inevitably took hold. Following the war’s brief interruption, the clearing resumed, making way for the much more significant battles of the American Revolution and the golden era of the development of great American towns. Then come chapters on ecclesiastical, manufacturing, and civic history, and tales of the last beaver or bear seen in the midst of modernity. After the first section on prehistory and colonial war, few mentions of Indians are made, if any, unless it is to mourn the passage of the “last of the [insert local tribe].” Indians, as O’Brien observes, would not be “part of the landscape of the future” (10).

“Lasting” is the other side of the twinned story of replacement. Most Americans are familiar with this master narrative from James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (xiv, 5). Many New England stories, newspaper articles, and historical clips also relate the passing of “the last of the [insert tribe].” For example, O’Brien succinctly discusses the numerous accounts of Zerviah Gould Mitchell, which characterized her as the “Last of the Wampanoags.” At the same time, these accounts acknowledge her many children and grandchildren, as well as the Wampanoag relations involved in a contest with Mitchell over land rights. Approaching this historical conundrum directly, O’Brien spent years gathering similar, seemingly factual “lasting” accounts, discovering that, like settlement signs, these reports of “lasting” are ubiquitous and deceptive. It is truly astounding how many times towns in Massachusetts mourned the death of the “last Natick Indian”: seemingly, the New England Indians behaved like the “knavish Maquas” in Cooper’s novel, who did not know when to just lie down and die. Of course, many contemporary tribal members are descendants of grandfathers or grandmothers who were proclaimed the “last of their kind.” O’Brien contends that, at their core, lasting narratives are making “an implicit argument” that “Indians reside in an ahistorical temporality in which they can only be the victims of change, not active subject in the making of change.” Therefore, descendants cannot truly be Indians, cannot pursue Indian land claims, and “can never be modern” (105–107).

These descendants are the focus of “Resisting,” the final chapter. Native families and indigenous nationhood in New England continued long past the persistent moment when they were supposed to have vanished into the misty past. The author examines extensive reports (such as the Earle Commission study in Massachusetts) that document Native families throughout southern New England who still inhabit their own “old towns” and, adapting to and

resisting colonialism, formed new multitribal enclaves. She analyzes the ironies inherent in the public dedication of monuments to Native leaders such as Miantonomi and Massasoit, the commemoration of battles in the Pequot War and King Philip's War, and inviting local Native representatives to celebrate the centennials of town foundings. Finally, in an insightful reading of William Apess's *Eulogy on King Philip*, O'Brien demonstrates how Apess epitomizes the survival, adaptation, and resistance of Native people in New England, composing his own version of New England history and reclaiming New England as "an Indian place" (190). As O'Brien notes, no town histories mention the controversial Pequot preacher, yet before a federal policy of sovereign rights had been articulated, Apess developed a vision of dual citizenship in which individual Indians would acquire all the rights of American citizenship, equal to their Anglo-American neighbors, while maintaining their sovereign rights as nations.

O'Brien, to borrow a phrase from Apess, "turns the looking glass" on the narration of New England history. *Firsting and Lasting* is a compelling, insightful, and comprehensive analysis of the replacement narrative and the resistance of Native people in southern New England to the stories intended to replace them. Using both traditional and modern methods that should be required reading for any student of American literature and history, O'Brien's book is a brilliant examination of settler colonialism which challenges the way that most Americans see their national "origin story." It represents the meticulous effort of a dedicated historian, and also bears the mark of the many years she has spent helping to build the field of Native American and indigenous studies. Future work on firsting, lasting, and the replacement narrative will assuredly illuminate this landscape in fresh ways. Those works will, however, owe a great debt to the intellectual labor of Jean O'Brien, as does my own.

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Indigenous Miracles: Nahua Authority in Colonial Mexico. By Edward W. Osowski. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010. 288 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

Edward Osowski's *Indigenous Miracles: Nahua Authority in Colonial Mexico* is a study of religion and power. Of the two major threads that run throughout the book, the first details the rise of miraculous sites after the conquest of Mexico. Osowski argues that Nahua ruling families sponsored these shrines to reinforce their authority within their communities and carved out a place for their polities in the new colonial order by appropriating rituals and images that were