

Title—Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire
Author—Coll Thrush
Year—2016

Categories: Empire, World History, Indigenous Studies

Place: London

Time: 1570-1960

Argument Synopsis:

This book attempts to present a history of London framed through the experiences of Indigenous people who traveled there, willingly or otherwise, from places that became Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia from the late sixteenth century through the twentieth. Thrush argues that London has been entangled with Indigenous territories, resources, knowledges, and lives from the very beginning of its experiments with colonization. Thrush initially framed his study around revealing a hidden London, an Indigenous London. However, he soon concluded that **Indigenous people do not need discovering**. Thrush does not attempt to speak for these Indigenous communities, but rather to illuminate their voices that have been thus far silenced.

The urban spaces of London have been one of the grounds of settler colonialism. In particular, Thrush seeks to address the narrative estrangement of urban and indigenous histories. This narrative estrangement reflected the broader perception of estrangement between Indigenous people and modernity, which undergirded years of racist colonial policies. He finds that this narrative estrangement has been challenged in recent years, especially in the aforementioned countries where the majority of Indigenous people reside in urban areas. He seeks to challenge this narrative further by disorienting the history of the city of London.

Through his narrative of the Indigenous histories of London, Thrush is able to identify common threads of the Indigenous urban experience, throughout the long temporal period. Thrush finds that these urban travelers were mostly men, and typically stayed close to sites of power and the people who inhabited them while in London. Regardless of period, Thrush claims that these Indigenous visitors were **shocked by the ecology of the city**, and deeply disturbed by the profound inequalities of wealth. Central to the stories explored by Thrush is the defense of Indigenous lands.

Thrush concludes with a discussion of the current efforts of repatriation from Indigenous communities with ancestors buried in London. He is focused on the remembering and reclaiming of the city and of Indigenous travelers by descendant communities, illustrating the ways that memory has entangled London in Indigenous history, even as the city has tended to forget its own empire. Thrush suggests that stories of Indigenous travelers should be viewed as open-ended, and the urban spaces of London as continually contested.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- London has a tendency to forget the empire, and especially the travelers that came through the city during the long period of empire
- Indigenous bodies served to alleviate crisis of masculinity
- Overwhelming belief that all Indigenous people would fade into the past, overwhelmed by modernity