

Unseen Commons: Natives, Newcomers and Ideas of the Land in
the Atlantic World, 1783-1870

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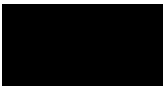
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Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing for this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Abstract

Ideas about the place of people on the land were still in flux when the United States won political control over the vast commons that Britain had reserved for Native Americans at the end of the American Revolution. The right to own land was not the be-all and end-all of the Atlantic World's push westward, despite the usual current interpretation. In the behaviour of the settlers, in the financial markets for warrants and other contingent claims to land, in the writings of economists and in the debates in Congress and within the Office of Indian Affairs, it is clear that the rights that the people of the Atlantic World believed they had to use land continued to encompass the idea of shared space and resources: the commons. Ambivalent sentiment about ownership is particularly evident in the negotiation and renegotiation of treaties with the Wyandot, Delaware and Seneca in Ohio as well as the disposition of the Half Breed Tracts of Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska. Even in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when a new economic orthodoxy required ownership to explain the distribution of profit, rent and wages, the desire for commons remained strong enough to generate preservation movements.

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