

Relational Autonomy: Two Row Selfhood Past and Present

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I propose to use the 2023 Bloomington Workshop to consider the model of transcultural relations articulated in the Two Row Wampum-Covenant Chain treaty as both a concept and a political obligation we have inherited from the eighteenth century. A treaty struck in Haudenosaunee territory (where I currently live and work), initially, between the Mohawk people and Dutch arrivants in 1613, and taken up and elaborated through repeated eighteenth-century negotiations between British diplomats and Haudenosaunee Confederacy leaders after the British took over governance of the settlements in this region in the late seventeenth century, the Two Row Wampum remains an active political agreement despite the fact that the European colonial settlement currently known as Canada has not adhered to its terms. The wampum's two rows of purple beads represent the parallel paths of the ship and the canoe, metonyms for the European and Haudenosaunee cultures and modes of governance; these "two rows" are set against three rows of white that stand for peace, friendship, and mutual respect. This living treaty constitutes an agreement that the ship and the canoe will proceed alongside one another, on the same river, in a peaceful and respectful way, without encroaching on one another's systems of governance or lifeways.

The Two Row's model of "alongsideness"—of relating *across* difference in a way that doesn't mandate eradicating that difference—founds peaceful coexistence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples located in the same place on a particular kind of autonomy, one constituted through its obligation to honor the autonomy of another while remaining in peaceful proximity. This model presents an important alternative to the potentially violent conditions of "inclusion," the current preferred model in North American institutions for more equitable relations across disparities of power; it reminds us, in fact, that "inclusion" was never part of the deal in which European settlers were invited to share space here in the first place. The Two Row very clearly articulates that there is no crossing of cultural or governmental thresholds as a condition of this formal relationship; that the closeness of the bond that allows the ship and the canoe to move together—to move *with* one another—into a shared future depends instead on the maintenance of both material and conceptual space between these bodies. At the same time, the Two Row makes explicit that the respective autonomy of the ship and the canoe is not synonymous with independence; that, on the contrary, each depends upon the integrity of the other's autonomous commitment to the relationship for its own sustained autonomous existence.

My contribution to the seminar will consider the implications of Two Row relations on both a personal and collective level, as something that eighteenth-century writers were thinking about and that we, too, might take up in our scholarly methods and ways of situating ourselves in relation to colonizing and decolonizing movements. As a diasporic settler of both Chinese and European descent, I approach the Two Row as an inhabitant of the ship with all its attendant responsibilities. Yet I am also interested in thinking about how the dynamics of global diaspora set in motion, in large part, by the global colonizing project of the eighteenth century prompt us to consider whether the Two Row's model of relational autonomy works as the rows proliferate and the matrices of power elaborate into the formations of "multicultural" capitalism. How do Two Row relations work, for example, in the context of intersectionality? And what are the conditions of reactivating Two Row relations in a world founded on the egregious dishonoring of

the autonomy of the canoe? What crafts are now moving (potentially) alongside one another, and where do we imagine they can and should go?