

Chapter 2: “Samson Occom, the Public Universal Friend, and a Queer Archive of the Elsewhere”

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Abstract: In March 1786, two of the most famous eighteenth-century preachers, Mohegan minister Samson Occom and the Public Universal Friend, born Jemima Wilkinson, encountered each other at a funeral near Mystic, Connecticut. This chapter turns to Occom and the Friend’s brief meeting as a lens for addressing their attempts to restore a “Body Politick” after the upheavals of the American Revolution, where Occom led a multi-tribal migration to Brothertown on gifted Oneida lands, while the Friend organized a retreat to a town they named Jerusalem, built on Seneca territory. Despite the proximity of their political experiments, they have never been read together, perhaps because their careers coordinate differently legible histories of race, gender, and sexuality—where Occom’s gendered body bears the weight of colonial notions of race, while the Friend’s nonnormative body participates in an early iteration of queer settler colonialism. I argue that their writings coordinate what I am calling an archive of the elsewhere—a reservoir of their yearnings for a “Body Politick” under differently racialized and gendered conditions of unfulfilled promise.