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Title: Book review: 'The two faces of American freedom ' by Aziz Rana  
Year: 2012  
Journal: Ethnic and Racial Studies  
Volume: 35  
Issue: 2  
Pages: 361-362  
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.627877>

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**Aziz Rana *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2010.**

*The Two Faces of American Freedom* outlines the rise and fall of the US “experiment” in settler constitutionalism. It is an ultimately convincing outline of nineteenth and early twentieth century American history as the history of a settler colonial project. While this project, and the conception of freedom that underpinned it, had emerged victorious with independence, they were terminated sometime between the defeat of Populism and the establishment of the New Deal order. To frame this narrative, Rana understands the settler order as fundamentally characterised by a political theory that was at once internally inclusive and premised on exclusion and expansion. On the one hand, it constituted an ostensibly egalitarian political community that allowed its members, including its most recently arrived members, northern European “co-ethnics” who were immediately allowed to access republican freedoms, an enhanced degree of meaningful participation. On the other hand, this egalitarianism was most decidedly not universal, and these freedoms necessitated an ongoing expansionary project of conquest. The two elements of this equation, Rana emphasises, were predicated on each other and could not be separated; hence the two faces referred to in the title.

Co-ethnics were needed and welcome. Rana focuses on widespread practices like noncitizen voting (enabled by alien suffrage laws) and noncitizen access to federal land. As the rights to own property and to vote were immediately extended to the newly arriving co-ethnics, their incorporation within the structures of the expanding political regime was indeed as seamless as it could be. In some locations co-ethnics did not even need to naturalise; often their rights could be activated by simply demonstrating an intention to eventually become naturalized. These practices in fact established a settler citizenship beside a US citizenship. The two were not coterminous. One could have both (i.e., white US-born citizens), the first but not the latter (i.e., the immigrant co-ethnics), or the latter but not the first (i.e., Black Americans). While this separation and the ability of specific constituencies to seamlessly move across jurisdictions demonstrate the existence of isopolitical ties and is typical of the settler colonial situation, as I have noted in *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Palgrave 2010), it is exactly because the “co-ethnics” were able to rapidly incorporate, as Rana also emphasises, that the boundaries separating insiders from outsiders could and were indeed hardened. A settler colonial order was thus able to reproduce itself for a long time.

However, the settler experiment was eventually discontinued. Rana detects a rupture: it wasn’t sudden but it constituted “a remarkable break” (p. 27). Bit by bit, as Rana’s narrative progresses, the project was systematically dismantled. Alien suffrage laws were gradually eliminated, literacy tests introduced, quota restrictions applied, deportation procedures enforced. A localized capacity to decide on the terms of inclusion was progressively appropriated by the Federal authorities.

The beginning of this unwinding coincided with the defeat of Populism, Rana argues. As the long history of rural restiveness is interpreted as settler resistance, the defeat of the Populist movement implied a crucial departure: never again a settler sensitivity would be effectively capable of countering the centralising drive of an expanding state. As a result, the strengthening of executive authority and the steady introduction of external prerogative powers meant an end to the settler empire and made

the US resemble for the first time a European-style bureaucratic state. It was an ironic outcome, and Rana notes how it was the American revolutionary patriots that had indeed fought against the possibility that this should ever happen. The “long-term consequence of the focus on security, global prominence, and muscular state power”, he notes, “has been an erosion of that divide separating monarchical authority from the account of republican self-government that grounded American independence” (p. 326).

The alien suffrage laws were also repealed one by one between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early ones of the twentieth. Their termination implied the comprehensive recoding of the “co-ethnics”. Now, rather than “being co-participants in a settler colonial enterprise, white foreigners – at least prior to naturalization – were outsiders properly governed through a legal regime distinct from that for full members”, Rana remarks (p. 237). In the end, “asserting the legitimacy of prerogative rights over European aliens, [newly introduced] restrictions organized previous settler insiders under the same rubric of control that applied toward Indians, blacks, Chinese, and Mexicans” (pp. 238-239). The settler citizenship was discontinued. Now you either were a citizen or you were not. The New Deal was the last stroke. It “ultimately involved abandoning the notion of freedom as self-rule. It dismantled settler institutions and ideals and created a new statecraft along the lines of the United States’ European rivals”, Rana concludes (p. 16). Without these institutions, a settler colonial order could no longer reproduce itself.

The “remarkable break” is undoubtedly there; Rana’s argument and novel framing of US history is entirely convincing. And yet, whether or not the settler project was discontinued should be debated. If it was discontinued at one point, we could go back. This is what Rana recommends when he praises an account of free citizenship open to the incorporation of outsiders and emphasises its “emancipatory promise” (p. 181). It is the notion that we no longer are in the presence of a settler colonial political regime that allows Rana to propose a return to the openness and inclusiveness of a settler colonial project. I wonder whether a “settler-freedoms-for-all” proposition is tenable. If the two faces of American freedom could not be separated then how can one think of separating them now? On the one hand, Rana’s prescription ultimately clashes with his original recognition that a settler project is necessarily premised on the subjection of others and on ongoing expansion. On the other, there is slippage, and that the co-ethnics were never outsiders should be emphasised. Most importantly, was the settler colonial project terminated in its entirety? Many Native Americans would beg to differ (indeed, it is significant that indigenous people are entirely absent from Rana’s account). Thinking it is, is like assuming that a party must be over because the bouncers are no longer letting anyone in the private area of a trendy club.